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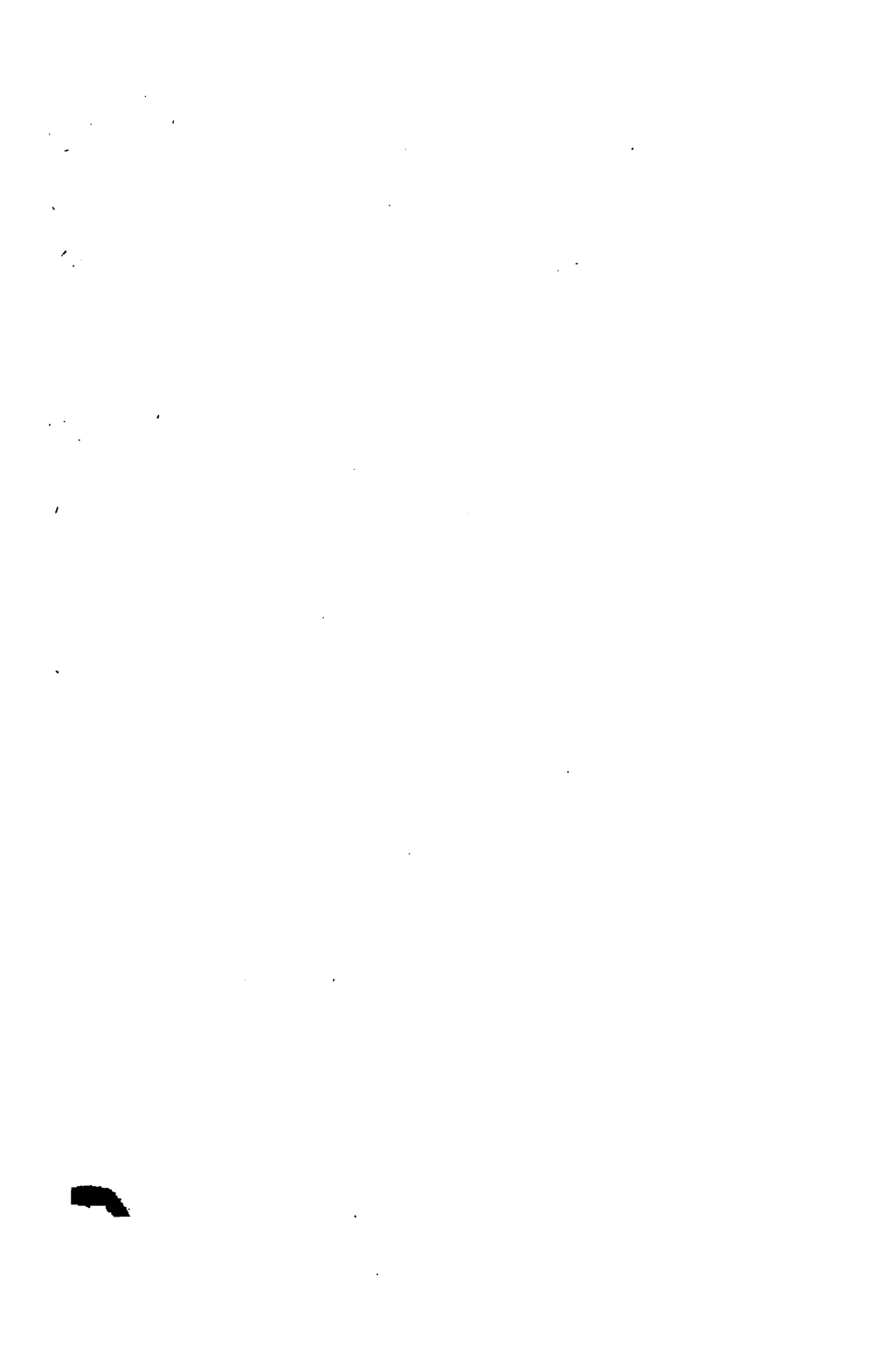
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*A  
Modern  
Fagan*  
by  
*Constance Goddard  
Du Bois*



Y.

# A MODERN PAGAN

A Novel

BY

CONSTANCE GODDARD DU BOIS

AUTHOR OF "MARTHA COREY," "COLUMBUS AND BEATRIZ," ETC.

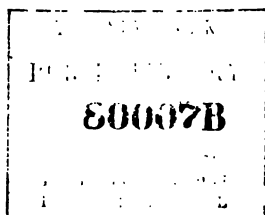


V.C.

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# A MODERN PAGAN.

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## CHAPTER I.

MR. VANCE sat in a large wicker chair upon a carpeted corner of the veranda, lazily watching the restless movements of his wife who paced to and fro before him, her figure projected against the background of waving branches and glowing sunset sky. In the little village of Suffolk Nature predominated and human beings became her adjuncts and correlatives.

"*Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh,*" Mrs. Vance had quoted on the day of her arrival at their summer home, when the mountains leaned against an amber sky and the moon rose at the full majestically bright. The Vances had lived for years in Germany, and they had an old-world sentiment and love of nature. They rejoiced to leave their city home at the time of the annual hegira, for their cottage among the New England hills.

Mrs. Vance particularly was full of romanticism and theoretical vagaries of various sorts. The orthodox religion of her girlhood of which she still preserved the



form and substance was overlaid with a singular patchwork of detached formulæ and ethical doctrines, often at war, but illogically superinduced as a result of her desultory studies. She was considered a clever woman, and her husband admired her and respected her judgment while he laughed at her enthusiasms. Their natures were singularly congenial. He was the opposite of introspective and lived only to make money by the honest application of a native talent for gain. He was able, however, to enjoy his leisure when he took it, in an unreflecting ease of mind and body which prevented him from degenerating into a business machine. He refused to receive letters or telegrams at Suffolk. He heroically refrained from consulting the stock report in the newspapers. He read novels and listened to his niece's music and his wife's conversation. When his vacation was over he plunged again into the world of affairs with a zest which made its severest strain endurable for another ten months.

As this couple had no children, they had adopted an orphan niece, Massey Hollister, and her presence introduced various complications into the well-ordered simplicity of the family life. Massey's youthful ailments, her education from the kindergarten up to the *pension*, her religious instruction, and the consideration of her future, were in turn questions of vital importance, affording a practical test for many of the theories on these subjects which Mrs. Vance had adopted. She had hitherto kept her ideas for reference, like pieces of

fine porcelain in niches, to be looked at, not handled too roughly, and they often proved singularly defective when put into practical operation. She early discovered that Massey's personality was a factor to be taken into account. Plans of education had overlooked the possibility of individual will that gives a resistant force to the child's mind which should be moulded like plastic clay.


Massey was not headstrong. She was gentle and amiable, but she was decided in her preferences and invincible in her enthusiasms. She could be led, but she would not be driven. She could be won to tears by a reproachful glance, but where her conscience spoke she showed the stuff of a martyr ready for sacrifice.

"I hope she will marry early and well," Mrs. Vance had said one day to her husband. "Where she loved she would surrender her whole being, and her husband should have dignity and judgment as well as youth and good looks. Oscar von Kramer is the man of all others whom I should choose for her. Since she herself is half a foreigner, she would take kindly to the life of the German aristocracy, and that stolid common-sense mixed with romantic sensibility which you find in the German character is so much more to the purpose than the vague irresponsibility of our American young men."

Massey had early heard interesting stories of young Baron von Kramer and of his mother, who was a favorite at the court of the Grand Duchess of B—,

and the bosom friend of Mrs. Vance. She saw many long letters which came from B——, written in the thin pointed characters of the German script, delicately formed by the hand of the baroness. A faint perfume always clung to these thin sheets that fluttered in the slightest breeze, sending the odor abroad with suggestions of the atmosphere of silken-hung salons in stately castles. Mrs. Vance knew how much to leave untold and magnified by mystery. Oscar remained a half-fabulous hero whose most amiable quality seemed a lurking inclination for the adopted daughter of his mother's American friend. "Oscar sends heartfelt greetings to Massey," was a favorite postscript with the baroness. There was a time when Massey's fancy took kindly to these suggestions, and her day-dreams were colored with Oscar's image in a golden haze.

But upon an unlucky day Massey disinterred from her uncle's book-shelves a pile of socialistic literature, to whose teachings she became an ardent convert. Mrs. Vance, who had long since passed that phase of mental evolution, locked up the books and withheld the key. Upon this Massey made the acquaintance of a refined and enthusiastic woman doctor, and went with her to every meeting of the Anti-Poverty Society. She visited with her in the slums, and for a week left her home to lodge among the devoted young women in the college settlement in Rivington Street. She denounced the aristocracy, scoffed at the dream of the German baron, and rejected the idea of matrimony for-



ever in favor of a life of altruistic devotion to the regeneration of society. Mrs. Vance was disconsolate, but her husband laughed at her fears and comforted her with words of practical wisdom.

Acting upon his advice, she no longer opposed her niece's enthusiasm. She presented her with the works of Henry George, and sent her carriage with Massey and Dr. Darling to the anti-poverty meetings. Soon Massey yawned herself to sleep over the subtleties of the single tax, and found the meetings of the society vulgar. She began to believe that Henry George was in error, and that the salvation of society must come from existing organizations of church and state purified and exalted by the consecration of their members. When Lent came she took to High Church Episcopacy.

Father Bleecker was a young man of such sincere spirituality that under his guidance the complexities of life were reduced to a single law easily defined and not difficult of acceptance. To be sure, the minutiae of conduct required in the obedient were multitudinous, but they adorned the barrenness of daily existence and gave it interest. Massey fasted, confessed, and did penance, all of which greatly displeased her aunt, whose prejudices were fixed in favor of individual liberty and against absolutism in church or state. The Von Kramers, moreover, were Lutherans of the strictest sort, an important fact in this connection.

When summer came Mrs. Vance gladly welcomed a change of scene.

"In Suffolk we are safe," she said to herself. "Existence here is delightfully commonplace. Massey will dance, and flirt, and play tennis, and her energies will be diverted from any serious purpose by the trivialities of summer-resort existence."

It was with this idea that she had recognized the rest that lies upon the mountain tops. That she had not found the wished-for repose was evident at this moment by the tragic expression with which she paused in her walk, and sinking into a chair beside her husband, exclaimed, "I am worried to death about Massey, Robert."

"What is the matter? Is she ill?" he asked.

"Worse than that," was the reply. "She is in love."

Mr. Vance looked amazed. "With whom?" he inquired.

"Massey would never forgive me for betraying her secret," replied his wife, "but it is really necessary that you should know. It will change all our plans. I will not tell you how I found it out. A photograph and a piece of music, blushes and tears—that is the substance of the evidence; but when I said, 'Massey, you love him,' she did not deny it. 'Has he dared to offer himself?' I asked. 'No,' she said. 'He never means to marry.' Then, too late, she declared it all a fancy of mine and a jest of hers, and to prove her indifference she flung his photograph into the fire and kissed me with tears in her eyes, which seemed to prove exactly the contrary."

"But who is it?" urged Mr. Vance.

"Gerald Maynard, the little organist," replied Mrs. Vance, in a despairing tone.

Mr. Vance raised his eyebrows. "The last man I should think she would fancy," he said. "You are surely mistaken."

"I wish I were," she answered. "Louise von Kramer sent me the loveliest photograph of Oscar. It came this morning, and I laid it, as if by chance, on Massey's desk. I found her comparing it with one of Gerald Maynard. Oscar is as handsome as a young Apollo, and tall and broad-shouldered in his regimentals, just the figure a woman admires. 'There is not much resemblance between them,' I remarked, as I looked over her shoulder. 'No,' she said. 'Baron von Kramer looks like a sleek, well-groomed animal, while Mr. Maynard's soul shines out of his eyes.' 'It is fortunate for him,' I said, 'that he is not photographed side by side with Oscar, for his five feet four inches would not show to advantage beside the young Uhlan's six feet two.' 'I like short men,' Massey said. 'But not when they wear threadbare clothes and calico shirts,' I said. 'What do I care for clothes,' Massey answered indignantly. 'I hope I am not so foolish as to fall in love with a uniform.' 'Massey, you are in love with Gerald Maynard,' I exclaimed, and she did not deny it."

"You are too intense, Julia," said Mr. Vance. "What does it matter whom she fancies herself in love

with? It is a phase that will pass like the others. You told me once that every girl of nineteen inevitably falls in love if it is only with Bottom wearing the ass's head; and will inevitably recover if left to herself."

"True, but Massey is not an ordinary girl," replied Mrs. Vance. "She is far more intense than I am. She is quite capable of pining away and dying of a broken heart."

"Did any one ever do that?" queried Mr. Vance.

"My dear Robert, you are dreadfully prosaic," said his wife. "You know that, while it is not a common thing, it is quite within the limits of possibility. Massey, at any rate, is sure to make herself very unhappy."

"What is to be done?" asked Mr. Vance.

"We must take her at once to Germany," was the answer. "We have a standing invitation from the Von Kramers at B—. Oscar is such a charming fellow, he will make her forget the other."

"You are inconsistent, my dear," said her husband. "How can she be ready to die of love at one moment, and take up a new affection the next."

"She may not forget as easily as I hope," replied Mrs. Vance, "but we must do all we can for her, and leave no stone unturned to secure her happiness."

"I should think that the pursuit of her happiness would require us to remain here and lay siege to the affections of Mr. Gerald Maynard," said Mr. Vance.

His wife stared. "You do not think we should encourage her in that?" she asked.

"Why not, if she loves him?" was the response. "Have you anything against him? He seems to me to be an inoffensive little fellow with a gentle, pleasant manner and a fund of innocent small talk which makes him an agreeable companion."

"He would never forgive you for calling his conversation small talk," said Mrs. Vance. "He declares that conversation is one of the lost arts, and he evidently believes that he has re-discovered it. He reads German with Massey to form her mind."

"Then is he not in love with her?"

"Oh, no; for he is forming the minds of half-a-dozen other women here. It is recreation and missionary work combined. He is magnificently impartial in his attentions. He finds it safer, I suppose, to be universal. He sings with Miss Spiegel, the musical little Jewess; he reads French with Miss Linton, an old maid of thirty, and goes sketching with Mrs. Grayling, a widow of thirty-five. He prefers the society of mature women, as a rule, but he walks and drives with every girl at the hotel in turn. He does not dance, probably because he has no dress-suit. His clothes are atrocious. There must be a charm in his conversation to cause that defect to be overlooked."

"It is a fault which can be cured," said Mr. Vance.

"I am not so sure of that. It goes with the artistic temperament, and that is as ineradicable as vice. I told Massey that she must forget him; that an artist



*liar* could not make a wife happy unless she were a dull, commonplace creature without nerves to feel the stabs he would inflict upon her daily happiness. If a writer, painter, or musician is an enthusiast and believes in himself, his inspiration is nothing more nor less than sublimated selfishness. Palissy, allowing his family to freeze and starve, while he broke up his furniture to feed his kiln, is only an exaggerated example of this inspired egotism which feels perfectly justified in sacrificing all other interests to its own. "lie me?"

"You talk very cleverly, my dear, but did you convince our niece?"

"Of course not," replied Mrs. Vance. "What person in love was ever convinced? Massey was gently obstinate. She would not promise me to try to forget him."

"Why should she? Let her enjoy her day-dream. Let her marry him if she likes. You have nothing against him personally, except that he is a musician and does not own a dress-coat."

"Oh, yes, I have," she answered. "In the first place he has not asked her to marry him, but very distinctly told her that he never intends to marry."

"Then he has been trifling with her," said Mr. Vance indignantly.

"Not that. He does not lay himself open to such charges. He never makes love. He is the confidential friend to a dozen women at a time. He believes in a sexless friendship which shall be a realized ideal of

the spiritual union of congenial minds. He does not see why people should always be falling in love. He said this to me one day, not to Massey ; but with her he illustrates his theory."

Mr. Vance frowned.

"He is heartless, as you say ; but it may be only a young man's talk which has no very serious meaning. His family connections are good ?"

"Oh, of course. He is a nephew of the Miss Brinkerhoffs, the son of the only sister who married, and she lost her share in her uncle's estate by marrying a poor minister who left a legacy of debts. Nothing will come to him by inheritance, but his aunts are willing and anxious to help him. He is proud and independent, and a thorough Bohemian. Miss Mercy Brinkerhoff has talked to me about him. When he has money he flings it away for any fancy that is uppermost. To purchase some costly trifle he will go without his dinner for a month."

"He should marry a rich wife whose money was inalienably settled upon herself," remarked Mr. Vance reflectively.

"You are still in his favor ?" asked Mrs. Vance.

"If Massey loves him," he answered. "She best knows her own mind and what will suit her fancy. We are not all constituted alike. A woman has a right to make her choice, I say, as you did, Julia, when you flung me a bouquet at the carnival in Rome. I should never have married you if it had not been for that

bouquet and the look you gave with it that told me you loved me."

"Oh, oh," cried Mrs. Vance. "You told me that you would wear a paper sunflower on your coat so that I might know you. I flung a bouquet which hit you on the head."

"Thus metaphorically flinging yourself at my head," interjected her husband.

"But as for a look of love directed towards the hideous mask you wore, nothing but the egregious vanity of a man could imagine it."

"If you had stopped to weigh me in the balance, as you wish Massey to weigh Maynard, you might never have flung the bouquet, and in that case I might never have given you a thought," he said.

"If I had known how happy you would make me, I would not have waited for the carnival," said Mrs. Vance. "I would have taken pity on you the year before when you were making yourself ridiculous by your desperate attempts to outrival Timothy Brown."

Mr. Vance gave a scornful snort, stretched himself, and rose to his feet. He heard Massey's light footstep on the oaken staircase, and soon the sound of her piano rose upon the air. It was her custom to play to him for an hour at this time, while Mrs. Vance worked among her flowers or gossiped with a neighbor before the gayeties of the evening began. He entered the parlor and seated himself where he could watch Massey's face. She sat with uplifted eyes like a

serious Saint Cecilia, and her fingers played a mournful minor air.

“What is it, Massey? Who wrote it?” he asked.

She blushed quickly. “It is a little thing of Mr. Maynard’s.”

“And you know it by heart?”

“Oh, yes,” she replied. “I learn all my music that way.”

She looked at him with furtive uneasiness, wondering how much he knew, and conscious of angry blushes of shamed confusion which came unbidden with the memory of her conversation with her aunt.

“He is a nice little fellow,” said Mr. Vance. “He seems to be quite attentive to you, Massey.”

Massey’s hands fell clasped together in her lap. She realized with a shudder that her aunt had been discussing her affairs, and that her uncle, with blundering kindness, meant to give her the assurance of his sympathy.

“Oh, Uncle Robert, he is nothing to me,” she said. “Aunt Julia has been telling you——”

“Nothing at all,” he added, too quickly to give the proof he wished the words to convey. “I have only kept my eyes open, and I can see for myself that he is very much in love with you.”

This was not at all what he had meant to say; but the look of piteous appeal from the eyes of his beloved child would have led him to perjure himself in any way that might give her happiness. The next moment he

wished the words unsaid, for an expression of joyful surprise shone on Massey's face, a tremulous smile of delight played about her mouth, and the inquiring glance she directed upon him was so full of trustful dependence upon the integrity of his word, while questioning the correctness of his observation, that he felt with a pang the absolute necessity of substantiating the declaration upon which so much depended.

She shook her head with an odd little laugh.

"Oh, no," she said, "we are good friends. That is all." Then she began to play a rondo with feverish rapidity. Mr. Vance's heart bounded with a parent's yearning to bestow all that a beloved child can wish.

"She shall have him. He shall love her. I will arrange it for them," he promised himself with determination. When the piece was ended he rose and took his hat.

"I must go down to the village, darling," he said. "You shall play me the rest another time."

Massey sat where he had left her, with her motionless hands upon the keys and her eyes fixed upon vacancy, until the servant came in with the lamps.

## CHAPTER II.

GERALD MAYNARD was seated at the piano in the ball-room of the Casino, furnishing waltz music to a noisy crowd of young dancers who urged him to endless repetition. He was obliging enough to outtire their elastic muscles ; then he sat with a smiling uplifted face talking to Miss Spiegel, the dark-eyed, hook-nosed maiden who loved to sing to his accompaniment, and who was suggesting that they should begin.

"Why not wait till to-morrow?" said Gerald. "There are so many people here now. I will come at nine o'clock in the morning for an hour's practice if you like."

Miss Spiegel, satisfied with this assurance, rejoined her mother with her music-roll under her arm as Mr. Vance approached.

"Will you allow me five minutes' talk with you, Mr. Maynard?" he asked.

Gerald rose with alacrity. "With pleasure," he answered. "Shall we walk outside?"

The portico and the graveled walks of the park were full of promenaders. The Casino was a cheerful place on a summer night.

"We have not seen you very lately at Mrs. Vance's teas," began Mr. Vance, arranging his forces for the attack.

"I am very busy," answered Gerald. "My evenings are usually occupied here. I furnish the music on off-nights, and accompany the orchestra at the regular Germans; but I often sit on your piazza in the morning with Miss Massey. I am sure I must bore you with my frequent visits."

"You cannot do that. We are always glad to see you. It is true that Mrs. Vance and I have some odd foreign notions caught from a long residence abroad."

Gerald began to take alarm. His companion's tone was ominously earnest.

"When a young man calls often and regularly, we, as responsible heads of the family, begin to consider that Massey's happiness, which is our first care, demands that we shall inquire into his intentions, as they say. In fact, we should insist that his addresses should be paid through us, and not be regulated by the haphazard American fashions."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Gerald. "I was not aware that I had any intentions. If I possessed such inconvenient accessories, you would be perfectly justified in inquiring into them."

Mr. Vance, for his own convenience, ignored this speech.

"Massey is nineteen, and we think that she should marry," he continued. "She is my only heir and will

have a comfortable fortune at my death, and a very handsome dowry at her marriage. Mrs. Vance and I are perfectly unworldly in our ambitions. We wish to select a husband for her who will make her happy. We thought of you as being of a suitable age and character, and of congenial tastes. Massey adores music."

"But I am not music embodied," said Gerald plaintively. "I am sure she does not adore me."

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Vance promptly. "She would obey us if we chose her a husband. That is all."

"Then I hope you will choose some one worthy of such a proof of her docility," said Gerald. "I shall never marry. I am in love with love. The idea of it is charming, but with me it is the most abstract of illusions. Instead of the poets' *Not impossible She*, I worship the quite impossible She, and I worship from afar. I could not make up my mind to surrender my personal liberty by marrying."

"Since you have no parents I cannot discuss the subject with them," said Mr. Vance persistently. "Such things are often arranged in Germany with very little regard for personal feelings, yet with the happiest results. I should say to your father, were he living, 'My dear sir, your son has not yet decided to settle in life. Here is an excellent opportunity. My niece is artistic. Her choice cannot be mercenary. I am able and willing to provide a competence for the future of both.'"



"Massey artistic! What do you mean?" exclaimed Gerald. "She plays atrociously."

Mr. Vance colored quickly, but he suppressed his resentment.

"She will improve," he replied. "Music is in the family. To me it seems that she has a pretty touch."

"But so mechanical," interposed Gerald.

"Her mother was a Hungarian lady of rank," continued Mr. Vance, "a quiet, placid woman, who manifested no peculiar talent beyond that of a good wife and mother, but the father of this lady was a composer, renowned in his own country, and her brother is known to the world as the famous pianist Blavatsky."

"Blavatsky is Massey's uncle!" exclaimed Gerald.

"Undoubtedly. I wonder that she has not told you."

"How strange it is! I had no idea that she was of foreign descent."

"My brother was a typical American, although he lived much abroad," said Mr. Vance. "Massey inherits mainly from him, as far as appearance and character are concerned, but she has a natural interest in music and musical people. It would be an advantage to you in your career to be connected by marriage with Blavatsky."

"No doubt," responded Gerald, whose eyes had a singular intensity of expression, as if he were considering an interesting mental picture. "But what is your object in so earnestly proposing my undesirable self as

your son-in-law? There must be more than you have told me."

"You are right," said Mr. Vance impulsively. "I did not mean to tell you, but you are a gentleman, and I can trust you. Massey loves you. She would die rather than reveal it, but we have found it out, and I appeal to your kindly recognition of her youthful confidence and esteem."

Mr. Vance had burned his ships and fired his last round of ammunition. He was now at the mercy of circumstances. He recognized the desperate position in which he stood towards Massey, but he felt an instinctive confidence in Gerald's delicacy, and, if the worst should come, the hurried departure for Germany, which his wife had planned, would still afford a way of escape.

Gerald longed to protest, to laugh, and to repulse with ridicule the proffered gift of Massey's heart; but like a guardian angel, with a flaming sword and a protecting ægis, there appeared behind her girlish figure the image of the great Blavatsky crowned with laurel, radiant with triumph, the high-priest in the temple of fame. The musician to whom he lent a hand could climb the heights of glory at a bound. He could not at once repel the pleasing suggestion.

"It is so odd, your making this proposal," he said. "I wish my father could have arranged it, I am sure. It is too embarrassingly personal for my own decision. I can think of no precedent to furnish me with a proper

reply. Massey is young, and will soon forget her fancy for me. I thank you for your kindness. Let us change the subject."

"Come to dinner to-morrow evening," said Mr. Vance.

Gerald did not refuse this invitation, though it seemed to imply much besides.

"Do not let Massey know that I have asked you," Mr. Vance continued, "but come up about six o'clock to practice a duet, or some such thing, and my wife will urge you to remain to dinner."

Gerald reproached himself that he could allow Mr. Vance to leave with this tacit understanding existing between them. During the next day he frequently told himself that he had no intention of going to the Vances. He was half-resolved to give up his engagement at the Casino, and to return at once to New York. As the afternoon drew to a close he made his toilet for the evening with more than usual care; and obeying a divided impulse of volition, part of his consciousness being purposely held in abeyance, he took a music-book and walked up the road to Mr. Vance's cottage.

Massey met him on the porch, and though she blushed when she greeted him, he saw in her clear eyes that she was no party to her uncle's scheme.

"I have brought a new duet which I thought you might like to try," he said.

The wide piano stool made a comfortable seat for

two. Massey's white muslin draperies floated towards him. When a page was to be turned, or a difficult passage pored over, her head was near his, and he lightly touched her hand, by chance. The touch thrilled him as it had never done before. It was flattering to his vanity to know that he was dear to the beautiful young girl whose gracious dignity would never have betrayed her feelings. When the duet was ended he began to turn the leaves of the music-book, as if looking for another number for practice. Massey sat waiting with smiling attention.

"You did very well," he said. "That *fortissimo* was good." A piece of paper fluttered between the pages of the book. He took it up, colored a little, and then with a look of particular meaning he handed it to her.

"It is for you," he said, "Heine's verse."

Massey read the German lines :

*Du bist wie ein Blume,  
So hold und schön und rein,  
Ich schau dich an und Sehnsucht  
Schleicht mir in's Herz hinein.*

She colored quickly, and lifted her long lashes to dart a look of inquiry into his eyes.

"For me !" she faltered.

"Yes," he replied impulsively, and, not to commit himself further to a verbal expression of the half-defined impulse he had begun with, he placed his arm

about Massey's waist and kissed her. Was it chance which decreed that Mrs. Vance should at that moment enter the room? The two on the piano-stool rose, blushing. Mrs. Vance held out her hand.

"My dear Gerald," she said, "do you expect me to forgive you for plotting to rob me of my child?"

"I hope you will give her to me," he answered, allowing his hand to be grasped in turn by Mrs. Vance and her husband, who appeared at this juncture.

"Massey must speak for us both," said Mr. Vance. "If she will have you we have no objection to make."

Dinner was announced, and Gerald found himself seated at Massey's side, her accepted suitor. She had not spoken, but she had yielded tenderly to his caress. She watched him shyly, her happiness transpierced by suspicion, as if she had seen the trail of a serpent in a garden of flowers. Had not the too-ready consent of her relatives been the result of a previous understanding between her uncle and aunt? Had not the scene been prepared, and Gerald led on to confession? Yet his kiss, which lay warm on her lips, had come from the heart. He loved her. What did the rest matter?

She wished that she might have kept him in suspense, that he might long have sued in doubt of her wish to bless him. An impulse of coquetry led her even now to hesitate as to the answer which she had

not given, and which they had all taken for granted. She wished that the tedious courses of a dinner and the prosaic occupations of eating and drinking need not intervene between that moment and its future. The small talk of the dinner-table was insufferable, yet she could not sit in silence and allow her feelings to be misunderstood. She longed to run away, but she did not dare to betray her uneasiness; so she sat and talked with assumed indifference about the german that was to take place on the following night, and asked questions at random, hardly waiting for the answers.

Gerald found a relief in the interruption to his love-making, though his heart beat fast when he met Massey's look. He talked incessantly on indifferent topics, dreading the recurrence to the subject uppermost in the minds of all. He felt ill at ease, and he was tormented by a doubt of himself, which had early intruded. Was he an impostor, or a dupe? He wished for the solitude of a long ramble under the stars, that he might settle that question with his conscience. Meantime Massey sat at his side, tremulously conscious of his every movement, her color coming and going with the changing emotions which his presence caused. He was proud of her beauty, and of her love for him, and he felt an added tenderness for her because she had given it unasked.

After dinner the young people strolled to the edge of the terrace to look at the new moon.

"We must see it over our right shoulders for good luck," said Gerald.

Massey stood beside a clump of rose bushes pulling some full-blown Jacqueminots to pieces and scattering their petals upon the wind.

"It seems to me that you have all taken a great deal for granted," she said, while her lashes drooped upon her cheeks. "I have not yet given you an answer."

Gerald was conscious of a momentary hope that Massey was about to set him free ; but her face spoke too eloquently of her love to leave room to doubt her meaning, and the impulse of pity which rose within him was a close counterfeit of affection.

"Did you not give me an answer when you kissed me, dear?" he asked, taking her hand, and with it a crimson rose.

"Oh, my love is like a red, red rose  
That's newly blown in June,"

he said, and he drew her hand upon his heart and held it there. Massey struggled to resist him, but the impulse of coquetry was weak. Her fingers fluttered for a moment and then lay still, while her eyes fixed upon him dilated with deep emotion.

"Oh, Gerald, I wish I need not love you," she said. "I would not if I could help it."

Gerald's gratified vanity showed in his smile. She quickly withdrew her hand. "You have made me confess it the first," she said. "How do I know that you love me?"

"Heine spoke for me, did he not?" he said. "Why do you doubt me? Do you believe it is your fortune which I am seeking?" He smiled as he spoke, but Massey recoiled in dismay.

"Have I seemed to accuse you of that?" she asked.

"You know that I am poor," he replied, "a struggling musician who can offer you no future. I told you that I never meant to marry. No man has a right to do so who cannot offer his wife a competency."

"I have enough for both," said Massey, "and, oh, forgive me for hurting you. I did not think of the money."

Gerald reassured her by a look; but as he walked homeward he told himself that his motive had been mercenary, although his indifference to wealth was real. If Massey had not been the niece of Blavatsky he would never have allowed chance to assist the schemes of her affectionate relatives. The verse which he had copied months before, and which had lain forgotten in his portfolio, Massey's presence and her smile, had combined to effect that to which his will had not consented. He wondered that he did not feel a keener regret. His conscience was sensitive on points of personal honor; but he silenced its warnings by a challenge to the future to redeem the present, and in the present he was content, remembering Massey's kiss.



## CHAPTER III.

A GROUP of ladies sat on the porch of Miss Everley's large boarding-house, their fingers occupied with flimsy creations of lace, linen, silk and worsted, though their imaginations and tongues were otherwise employed. They were enjoying the sort of gossip which has the relish of a piquant sauce or a fiery liqueur. Its communication requires lowered voices and expressive tricks of lip and eyebrows. The fact that it rests upon unstable foundations and unreliable evidence detracts nothing from the zest with which it is retailed and accepted.

Upon this scene of enjoyment a hush had suddenly fallen. Mrs. Grayling, dressed in a Paris gown whose flounce she daintily raised from the graveled walk, approached the house, twirling her inverted parasol in her fingers, and smiling to show her pearly teeth. Mrs. Grayling had been the subject of the conversation which her appearance cut short, but every one nodded and returned her smile with impressive friendliness.

"I have a great piece of news for you," she said, looking about with an air of cheerful benevolence as

she reached the porch and sank into a chair. "You can never in the world guess what it is."

Mrs. Brownell, who represented in her own person the combined importance of wealth and aristocracy—her father had been a sugar-dealer, but he figured in memory as a retired East India planter—drew herself up severely as if discounting in advance the value of the information; but the others urged that they should be told, hazarding wild guesses which caused the fair widow to laugh in her hearty, reprehensible way.

"I won't torment you," she said good-humoredly, "though you could guess a week without hitting the mark. Massey Hollister is engaged to Gerald Maynard."

A great sensation was produced by this surprising piece of news. A babel of voices arose which overwhelmed the narrator with question and comment.

"I don't wonder you are surprised, as I am. I thought the dear boy was in love with me. He has such a way of looking out of his eyes. I will wager a pound of Huyler's that every one of you ladies here secretly cherished the same delusion," said the cheerful widow with another laugh. Mrs. Brownell arose and retired within the house with a look of offended dignity, but in spite of her significant departure the others still encouraged the narrator by eager and pressing interest.

"That is all," she concluded. "I give you that *bonne bouche* to digest at leisure. It is all I know, but

it is enough. I must go and burn up the bunch of clover Mr. Maynard gave me with such a pretty smile this morning at breakfast, and I must hide my tears from the world's critical eye."

With this she smilingly arose and dawdled into the house, swinging her Paris bonnet by one string.

"What a remarkable creature," cried Julia Brownell. "I should think a woman with her history would be more careful what she says. To include us all in the same category with herself! I never could see anything to admire in Gerald Maynard."

"Nor I," came in a chorus.

"He is very amusing and nice to flirt with, but who could take him seriously?" said Clara Mills, the belle of the tennis court. "He has told every one he never meant to marry. He makes friends with women just as he does with men. He does not know any difference. It is pleasant for him and for the girls, too. He is an awfully jolly friend to have."

"Poor Massey," said Mrs. Lane, a plaintive little woman, whose usual mental attitude was that of deprecating melancholy, "she is such a sweet, intelligent girl. I am sorry that she should marry a man who has such unorthodox views. He told me once that he really didn't believe in anything."

"Oh, every one knows that," said Julia Brownell. "He's rather proud of being a skeptic. They always feel superior."

Dinner was announced, and Gerald Maynard's appear-

ance was expected with interest. He had rooms in a cottage near by, and took his meals at Miss Everley's. So did Miss Alice Linton, and to-day they came into the gateway together.

"There is another blighted being," remarked Clara Mills laughing. "She has been trying to catch him all summer. I wonder if she knows." Miss Linton was smiling at Gerald with that peculiar warmth of expression which he was capable of calling up in the eyes of women when he talked to them.

"If he were an immoral man," Mrs. Brownell had once declared, "he would be dreadfully dangerous." But Gerald's family connections, who represented the wealthiest aristocracy of the county, were an unimpeachable voucher to the respectability evident in his character; and Mrs. Brownell allowed Julia, a severe maiden of twenty, to embroider his handkerchiefs with careful devotion.

Women in general responded readily to Gerald's amiable fondness for their society. They gave an instinctive welcome to his Platonic style of spiritualized flirtation, seldom misunderstanding him; though in the eyes of observers these ideal friendships sometimes took on a more commonplace appearance, and complications occasionally arose, as notably in the case of Massey Hollister. It seemed to his friends that Gerald's character was unique and peculiar. Miss Linton, who admired James's novels, declared that he was the existing type from which that skillful delineator

of delicate mental processes had drawn his young men.

"I cannot be like all of them," he said one day, protesting against this opinion.

"You are not so much like Basil Ransom and Christopher Newman, but you are the living image of dear little Hyacinth, and a compound of Gabriel Nash, Roderick Hudson, and a dozen others," she replied.

Because Miss Linton had used an endearing term with so direct an application, Miss Mills' opinion of the designs of this spinster of thirty need not be shared by the reader; for the consciousness of superior age and the impartial nature of her friendship for him, gave to their intercourse a freedom from conventionality which in her eyes was its greatest charm. Thus she smiled with frank goodwill when she met him by the gate, and walked beside him up the path between Miss Everley's hydrangea bushes. When they reached the piazza Clara Mills ran forward and seized Gerald's hand.

"Oh, Mr. Maynard, we have heard the news. Allow me to congratulate you," she exclaimed.

"Oh, don't!" he cried in emphatic deprecation, escaping into the house.

"Is it not true, or is it not announced?" persisted Clara as she followed him.

"I do not know what it is," he replied, seating himself at the table and beginning to swallow hot soup in an agitated manner.

"Oh, Mr. Maynard," called Mrs. Grayling across the table, "you were the young man who railed at matrimony. Did I not advise you to try it before you condemned it? I congratulate you heartily," she added under her breath. "Massey is a perfectly lovely girl."

Gerald blushed deeply.

"Spare my blushes," he said. "I really do not know what you are talking about."

"Oh, don't pretend ignorance," she said. "I had my news at first hand. I met Mrs. Vance at the post-office. She was on her way to announce it to your aunts."

"Then I may hear it if I go there to lunch," he said. "I remember now that they are expecting me. Make my excuses here, if you please. I will give my place to the next comer."

Upon this he rose and retreated precipitately, leaving curiosity and consternation behind him.

"Upon my word," said Julia Brownell, "if I were going around announcing an engagement I should not care to have my *fiancé* deny it."

## CHAPTER IV.

MRS. VANCE and Massey were seated in the large dimly lighted drawing-room where the five Miss Brinkerhoffs presided as multiplied Graces or diminished Muses beside their ancestral hearth. Brady, the decorator, had transformed this symbolic fireplace from rusty brick to carved and polished African marble. The whole house had undergone a similar modification. From a rambling unpretentious country seat it had been changed to a palatial residence. It was thus classified in the language of the *County Herald*.

Suffolk was proud of its old families, and newly acquired wealth gave a lustre to the distinction which the Brinkerhoffs had enjoyed without the aid of riches for many generations. Lawyers, doctors, and ministers had left in the family records a legacy of honorable fame ; but one successful business man, who had left millions behind him, had gilded the titles to respect graven on their tombstones, and raised the position of the five nieces who were his heirs many degrees in the estimation of the vulgar.

The Misses Brinkerhoff took kindly to wealth, and scattered it abroad so lavishly that Suffolk enjoyed a

local renewal of the golden age. They adorned their native village with a chapel, fountain, library, casino, public baths, statues and parks. It became a favorite summer resort. They gave free concerts, lectures and dances. They were the patronesses of every entertainment. They enjoyed life by giving enjoyment to others, an old recipe for happiness which never fails when put to the test.

When Gerald Maynard had pleaded an invincible shyness as an excuse for failing to announce his engagement to his aunts, Mrs. Vance had taken it upon herself to divulge the fact in a note addressed to Miss Mercy, the one of the sisters with whom she was best acquainted, and in return she and Massey had received an invitation to lunch with the family at noon the next day.

On this occasion Massey found the formality of the drawing-room tedious and the conversation of the ladies uninteresting, for Gerald had failed to appear at the appointed hour. His aunts had each received her with a kiss, and had congratulated her in a tone which expressed more astonishment than pleasure at her prospects.

"I am delighted to have Gerald marry," said Miss Mercy. "We always felt badly because he refused to."

Lunch was announced by a liveried butler.

"What shall we do?" asked Miss Hetty. "Gerald is so late. Shall we go in without him?"



"By all means," replied Mrs. Vance, as the four sisters gave no counsel. Massey was seated at one end of the wide table where Gerald's empty place was prepared beside her. His absence was felt by all as a damper upon the cheerfulness of the occasion. Massey could hardly restrain her tears. When Miss Mercy gave the signal to leave the table, she took Massey by the hand to show her a painting of Gerald in his early childhood, in a blue flounced dress and a white straw hat which shaded a round face, yellow curls, and staring eyes.

"My dear girl," she said, with friendly warmth of manner, "let me give you a piece of advice. If you are going to marry Gerald Maynard, do not make yourself wretched by expecting anything of him. If you love him he will make you happy—that is, if you are not *exigeante*. Take him just as he chooses to be, and you will find him charming ; but judge him by common rules of duty and responsibility, and he is aggravating beyond anything. I love him so well that I can speak frankly."

Massey thanked her none too heartily, for Miss Mercy's kindness was greater than her tact, but Gerald's *fiancée* assumed, during the remainder of the visit, a gayety she did not feel, wishing to prove that his failure in duty had no power to affect her happiness. When she reached her home she locked herself in her room and cried for an hour, while her parents held an anxious consultation concerning her.

Eight worthy people had suffered greater or less disturbance of mind because Gerald Maynard had chosen to climb Bald Mountain and lie on the grass upon its summit when appointed to lunch in state with his betrothed. Upon leaving Miss Everley's table in confusion and bitterness of soul, he had felt an imperative need of solitary self-communing. He could not endure the idea of the formal family party with which his aunts meant to put the seal of their approval upon his engagement. He had hoped to escape it by a plea of forgetfulness, and to take a midday dinner at the side of Miss Linton, to whom he had promised to relate the scheme of his latest musical composition. The hateful gossip which had preceded him had driven him from the table, and now he lay crushing the wild mint upon the grassy mountain top in all the luxury of woe. The sweet smell of the bruised leaves he had been pulling was a consolation. The soft wind was a caress. Nature was always sympathetic, and he could read into her responses a meaning that could satisfy the vaguest yearning or the most complex intellectual difficulty.

At present his grief was horribly practical. He was to marry a girl for whom he did not greatly care. He had brought upon himself that conflict between the ideal and the actual which he had always foreseen to be a direct result of marriage and its attendant circumstances. His life had hitherto been singularly serene and self-centered. He was a modern pagan, with the graces of modern culture and æstheticism superinduced

upon the old refinements of Greek philosophy. The lack of a definite creed is a wonderful simplifier of existence. Most of the wars and tumults of history, the struggles and heart-rending debates of personal consciousness have had a religious basis. To escape from a narrow chapel into the large liberty of pillared temples where the only incense curling towards the blue is from the altar to the unknown God ; to walk in a friendly communion with all the wise and the great, accepting or rejecting their messages as the throned Ego shall dictate—this gives a man a pleasing sense of spiritual emancipation.

Gerald was moral from a deliberate choice of the good as the beautiful. Life seemed to him a thing of exquisite possibilities, of which the half had not been noted by the gross sensualists who drain the cup to the dregs, or press the grape so rudely to their lips that they taste the bitter hidden in its purple skin. He was full of the vague day-dreams of youth, though he mourned the fact that his actual youth lay behind him. He was twenty-seven, old enough surely to resist being pushed towards matrimony against his sober judgment.

He could jilt Massey and bear the blame of it. He did not reject this suggestion out of consideration for her, but he compared its consequences with his future as her husband. As Blavatsky's nephew he would no longer meet with rejection from publishers. He could hope for success and fame. He abhorred the idea of mercenary calculation, yet money, after all, would be

needed to shield one from the sordid cares which too often threaten conjugal felicity.

He drew from his pocket a letter and a photograph, as if wishing to summon to his side two absent friends whose advice might assist his decision.

"I have been eating *haschisch*," Rudolph Blackman wrote. "I spare you the description of its effects which you may find in the writings of others; nor will I inflict upon you the attack of blue devils which came as a reaction. I am once more myself, and richer by an experience. What does it matter what the nature of the experience is? We are here to know, to feel, to love, to suffer, to enjoy, not to exist like a fat oyster shut in a shell and sucking in a languid current from the ebb and flow of life until the last wave bears our rotting carcass into the vast profound. What are you doing in the Suffolk hills? or do you still hold to Gabriel Nash's rank heresy that 'being is doing,' and waste your days in gossip and pianoforte accompaniments?"

"According to Rudolph I should marry to gain an experience of a new phase of life," he thought. "If I am unhappy in it, that will be an experience the more."

He took up the photograph, which was that of a handsome young woman with a delicate artistic face, and waves of floating hair, blown back from a smooth thoughtful forehead.

"What do you say, Reine?" he asked, smiling at the

smiling face. "No, a thousand times no ; that would be Reine's answer. Women are always jealous. A mother never wishes her son to marry, and Reine's affection for me is half maternal. If I am to keep faith with Massey I must not wait for her permission. She will forgive me when it is over. The fact will not make any difference in our friendship ; but the foreboding of it would be an imaginary obstacle between us."

He rose and descended the mountain, admiring the long shadows that filled the hollows and purpled the distance.

He went to see Massey that evening to make his apology.

"You must not scold me for missing the lunch, dear," he said, as she met him on the porch. "I can never be depended on to keep an engagement."

"Will you break ours?" she asked in jest.

"If it lasts too long," he said. "Massey, you must marry me at once. I am a dreadfully irresponsible fellow—the despair of all my friends. If you are to take me for better, for worse, take me now and make the best of me."

"Oh, how can I?" exclaimed Massey in alarm. "Aunt Julia suggests that we wait a year or two. She wishes me to travel abroad for a year, and then to go to Paris to buy my trousseau. When I am twenty-one she thinks it will be soon enough."

Gerald made no immediate reply. He spent the

evening in the family circle, conversing cheerfully with Massey's friends ; but when he left, he asked Mr. Vance to walk with him a short distance.

"I will be frank with you, Mr. Vance," he said. "You wish me to marry your niece, and I am both ready and willing to do so ; but I give you fair warning that, after my return to the city, I am not to be depended upon to keep my engagement."

Mr. Vance started, and looked keenly at the young man who made this statement in a tone of sincerity.

"Is there another woman in the case?" he asked quickly. "Have you an entanglement of that sort?"

Gerald shook his head with a peculiar smile. "My entanglements of that sort have been mostly imaginary and Platonic to the extremest degree," he said. "Many of my friends are women. They would none of them approve of my marrying. They consider me foredoomed to celibacy, by the peculiarity of my disposition which has always made a condition of absolute perfection in the woman I could love. I renounce this in view of Massey's near approach to perfection ; but I assure you that I am not to be depended on. I have a reputation for being thoroughly unreliable. It is better to be frank."

Mr. Vance found Gerald's frankness extremely mystifying. "You mean to insist upon an immediate marriage?" he asked.

"Yes. Let Massey marry me before September, if her happiness is to depend upon me."

"I will consult my wife," replied Mr. Vance, frowning. "I will be guided by her opinion."

As a result of this consultation, Mrs. Vance came to Massey's room that night and begged her to give up Gerald Maynard.

"Only fancy, Massey," she said, almost in tears, "he makes it a condition of the engagement, that you shall marry him this summer, before he returns to the city. Of course it is impossible. The engagement must be broken."

Massey had started from a dreamless slumber, and her confused thoughts could not grasp the situation clearly.

"He is so very peculiar, he would never make you happy," continued her aunt. "I warned you about the egotism of the artistic character. You will never be able to understand him. I cannot see your life sacrificed to a girlish fancy which will pass away and leave you to regret it ever after. Since he makes an immediate marriage a condition of the engagement, the affair is at an end, for I absolutely refuse to countenance so unreasonable a demand."

"Oh, Aunt Julia, I love him!" cried Massey, stretching out her arms, and drawing her aunt's head upon her bosom. "I cannot give him up. Do not ask me to. I am weak and foolish. I ought to have more pride and independence. He has no right to make demands. I am the one to dictate, and your wishes should be consulted first of all, but if he insists, it must be as he says."

With this open declaration of her love, she laid her head upon her pillow and slept the sleep of youth, while Mr. and Mrs. Vance, wakeful and distressed, discussed her prospects with regretful anxiety.

"I should not have meddled as I did," Mr. Vance confessed. "When we play at providence, we make grave mistakes."

"And you won me to take your part," replied Mrs. Vance. "I am more than ever sure that it is Oscar von Kramer who should be Massey's husband. It is too late now. The mischief is done. We can only hope that something can be urged to change Mr. Maynard's unreasonable determination."

Gerald's influence, however, had sufficient weight with Massey to convince her that what he asked was no more than she could reasonably grant; and the wedding-day was fixed for the thirtieth of August.




## CHAPTER V.

GERALD was an indulgent lover. He required no sacrifices on Massey's part. When she offered to give up waltzing with another than himself, he declared it to be an unnecessary concession to prejudice.

"I like to see you dance," he said. "Why should you lose an innocent enjoyment? Marriage ought not to be a slavery. We have outgrown that phase in the evolution of the family. A woman, from the moment she pledges her future to the man of her choice, should not imagine that she is relinquishing her personal liberty; for, as I view it, it is a contract for mutual advantage, and not for self-abnegation and discipline. Mutual concessions are necessary, wise people tell us; but perhaps we shall be still wiser and learn to make no demands that shall require concessions."

Massey found such speculations uncomfortably vague. Deny it as she may, a woman instinctively loves to be tyrannized over by the beloved being to whom she owes allegiance. This unacknowledged bias of mind may be a survival of certain prehistoric conditions in the evolution of the family to which Gerald had alluded. Massey desired no exemption from established rules. She did not share Gerald's scorn for



conventionalities. In accepting for her future the common lot of women, she was willing to embrace its strictest and most orthodox requirements.

Gerald was peculiar, as Mrs. Vance had said. Massey foresaw that some exceptions must occur to vary their existence. He was a Bohemian by instinct. His rules of conduct were self-made, and applied according to principles of his own ; and he claimed for himself the same measure of liberty which he was willing to accord to others.

The lovers were boating on the lake one morning. Gerald had removed his coat for freedom of action in rowing. He looked well with his pale face flushed by exercise, and his curly hair stirred by the breeze. Massey lifted the coat which had been thrown aside, and felt in the pocket for a cigar which she meant that he should smoke when they reached a shaded shore among the lily-pads, while she read aloud from Faust, in the original. German verse requires a faint accompanying odor of tobacco-smoke for its appreciation, and the dip of oars is a soothing interlude.

Instead of the cigar, she drew forth the photograph of a young and pretty woman, not herself, and this she held towards Gerald with a gesture of imperious inquiry. "Who is it?" she asked.

"That is my very dear friend, Reine Chapman," he replied. "Have I not shown it to you before?"

"No ; and you have never told me about her," she said.

"That is because we have had so much to talk of. Under ordinary circumstances, I should have bored you with the account of Reine's perfections. She is an artist, and she lives with her mother in a tiny flat in Brooklyn. They do not keep a servant, and Reine supports the two by her painting, and by teaching for a certain number of hours a week in a girl's school. They are trying to pay off some debts which the father left when he died. They have been very good to me. Reine has petted, scolded, and nursed me for the last five years. Their house is one of my homes. When I am ill, lonely, blue, or hard up, I go there to be cheered and encouraged. My friend, Frank Bumstead, lives across the street, and we three have delightful symposiums together. Reine sings, I play, and Frank recites his own verses. He is something of a poet, though he does not attempt to publish. He does not wish his writings to be profaned by vulgar eyes. He believes in art for its own sake. He thinks that it is a sacrilege for Reine to put her paintings on exhibition. You will love her, Massey. Has she not a fine face?"

"She is pretty," answered Massey, "but I am sure I shall not like her."

"Oh, why?" cried Gerald. "I should be dreadfully disappointed if you two were not great friends. In fact it would be a particular calamity. It would separate my life into two contradictory halves—I should not know how to adjust myself to a dual and divided existence."

"Why did you not marry her if she is so necessary to your happiness?" asked Massey stiffly.

"I do not know, I am sure," he answered. "We have wondered sometimes how we could love each other so well without being in love. It must be because we are both absorbed in art; and we have always held to the belief that celibacy is part of the artist's creed. I gave that up, Massey, for your sake."

Massey forced a smile. "Have you asked her permission to marry me?" she inquired ironically.

"I have had no chance to consult her," he replied.

"Then of course she will hate me. You must be aware of that," said Massey.

"Oh, no," said Gerald. "You do not know Reine. She has too much sense and amiability to be jealous. I have a horror of the possibility of such a vulgar complication in our lives, Massey. Why must the intimacy of married life do away with the dignity and courtesy which we give to our intercourse with strangers? Why must it involve the lowering of the ideal and the exaltation of the commonplace? Do you think that Byron was a brute because it made him furious to see his wife pick a chicken bone at her breakfast? I can understand his feeling exactly, the ground of it I mean."

"I hope you will not take him as a model," said Massey. "He made his wife very wretched."

"Fancy my imitating Byron," cried Gerald with a laugh. "He is long since out of fashion. We have

learned to frown upon exaggeration in life and manners, and to strive for a Greek symmetry and finish in these *fin-de-siècle* times. Some of us, at least, find our highest good in æsthetic perceptions, which are as remote as possible from orgies of sensuality or Berserker fits of rage. I promise you, Massey, not to dash your tray of breakfast dishes on the floor, even if it should pain me to see you picking a chicken bone."

Massey smiled. "I am not sure that I should have been very indignant if in Lady Byron's place," she said. "I think it would flatter me to have a man do wild and exaggerated things for my sake. You know that my mother was a Hungarian, and I can count a long line of those hot-tempered, uncivilized Magyar nobles as my remote ancestors. I am not in the least æsthetic or *fin-de-siècle*. You will have to teach me that, Gerald."

Here she gave her lover his cigar, dutifully lighting it for him, and began to read the German poet with fine expression. Gerald reclined at the bow of the boat in lazy contentment. Massey's face was a charming object for a continual *vis-à-vis*. He was sure that Reine would commend his choice of a wife, if once she became convinced that the amiable, docile young girl would never interfere with the place she herself held as guide and inspiration in the heart of the eccentric young composer.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE thirtieth of August was a perfect day for a wedding, and all Suffolk was agog with the expectation of it. The two youngest Miss Brinkerhoffs with the aid of the gardeners had decorated the little stone chapel with the finest flowers. Each of the five had given a costly present to the bride, and had presented their nephew with a generous sum of money. "For, you know," Miss Mercy said to Mr. Vance, "our money is all tied up, and we can only spend the income of it. The principal will go to the son of my eldest brother, and Gerald will get nothing at all. It does not seem fair, but wills never do."

Mr. Vance, who had been willing to purchase Massey's happiness at any price, had overlooked the fact of her bridegroom's impecuniosity. Gerald had been frank with him from the first ; but Mr. Vance had not listened to his explanations. "I have enough for you both," he had said, and as Massey's wedding-gift, her uncle had settled a handsome annuity upon her.

"It is just as well for Massey to have the money in her own name," he said to his wife. "She will need a whip-hand over this husband of hers, and money is a good and convincing argument."

Mrs. Vance had engaged, through an agent, a pleasant little flat for the young couple, and it was to be furnished and ready for their occupancy by the middle of September. In regard to the furnishing she had encountered an unexpected difficulty. Gerald professed the most amiable gratitude for her generosity, but insisted that such a vital matter should not be left to an agent, unless that agent were Brady himself.

"But Brady would not consider economy at all," said Mrs. Vance. "He would furnish one room perhaps with the sum I have destined for the whole house."

"Would you not rather have one perfect room than a whole house full of incongruities?" asked Gerald. "I am sure that half the misery of unhappy married lives could be traced to the influence of sordid, vulgar, and glaring things on walls and floors. I would rather live in an Adirondack camp, where we could have nature pure and simple about us, than in a red and blue plush upholstered parlor."

"If I had had the year or two I wished before Massey's marriage," said Mrs. Vance with dignity, "we could have chosen everything in Paris. In order to furnish a house in three weeks it is necessary not to be over-particular. But you may do as you choose. A certain sum of money is at your disposal. Spend it as you like."

"How kind of you not to be offended at my notions," said Gerald, with his brightest smile. "My friend,

Frank Bumstead, is my second self. I could trust him with anything. He would be glad to do this for me; and my friend, Miss Chapman, shall select the colors. Then they will be right."

Mrs. Vance agreed. Massey was not to be consulted, for she was to know the pleasure of a surprise, and, in her great and absorbing joy in the present and future, the young bride felt no interest in the affairs of material existence. The boarders at Miss Everley's were much better informed than Massey as to the cut of her wedding-gown, the number and value of her presents, and all the arrangements for the ceremony, the breakfast, and the departure of the bride and groom by the White Mountain train for a two weeks' wedding-tour.

All took place according to their expectations. Massey was a beautiful bride. Miss Spiegel played the wedding-march on the chapel organ. Gerald noticed that she made false notes. The five Miss Brinkerhoffs in Worth gowns, and each with an enormous bouquet, were a notable feature of the assembly at the Vances' cottage. The bride was toasted in champagne, and a slipper full of rice was flung after her as she drove to the station.

"I hope that Gerald will make her a good husband," said Miss Mercy to her sisters.

"I hope that Massey will be happy," said Mrs. Vance to her husband, while a tear struggled with a smile.

"We shall miss her," said Mr. Vance with a sigh.

"Why will young folks give up their dearest friends



for the first stranger they happen to fancy? What folly this love is!"

He held out his hand to his wife with a tender smile. "It is the maddest folly," he added, "but when it has lasted twenty years, and become mellowed by time, it is as worthy of respect as good old wine which was nothing but heady froth at the first drawing."

Suffolk was so dreary without Massey that her adopted parents hastened their return to the city, and the days dragged until the time when she was expected. They met her at the station one evening in a drizzling September rain.

"*Der Sommer ist hin*," said Mrs. Vance, shivering as she paced up and down the platform, arm-in-arm with her husband. The train was late, heavily laden with returning tourists. "These September storms are so dreary. I hope that number 225 is in good order, and bright and cheerful to greet the little mistress. How foolish I was, Robert, to give up the business of furnishing it to these people. One gives up so much first and last to relations-in-law; but they are not even related to Gerald. What real interest can they take? I sent flowers and candles by Annette, but I have not dared to go near myself. I was sure nothing would be right; and I did not want to disapprove till Massey was settled, and we could make changes gradually."

A stout blond young man was walking the platform with his hands in his pockets. He cast curious glances at the husband and wife as he passed and repassed

them, catching fragments of their conversation now and then. When the train came in he followed them closely, and while they were enfolding Massey in a parents' embrace, he was greeting Gerald with equal warmth.

Gerald introduced him as "My friend, Frank Bumstead," and Massey exclaimed, with a laugh, as she gave him her hand, "I am happy to meet Mr. Bumstead, of whom I have heard so often that I have almost learned to be jealous. You have been the beginning and the end of half of Gerald's conversation."

"Oh, not so bad as that," said Gerald. "You will make Frank feel too important."

"I always feel important. I have been your husband's providence for years," said Mr. Bumstead. "Just now I have done him the service of furnishing a house for him."

"I hope it is nice," said Massey. "I am so anxious to see it."

"My dearest," whispered her aunt, "I can never forgive myself for leaving it to him. Come out of the wind. The carriage is waiting." There was no room for Mr. Bumstead in the carriage, and Gerald proposed that he should walk with his friend.

"We shall reach the house before you," he said, waving his hand after the carriage. "Oh, Frank," he continued, "My wife is an angel. Has she not a charming smile? Do you not admire her eyes? Will not Reine be fond of her?"

"I cannot answer for Reine," replied Bumstead stiffly. "Mrs. Maynard has a beautiful face."

"How odd it sounds to hear you say Mrs. Maynard. When shall we be talking of Mrs. Bumstead? Why do you not marry Reine?"

"Oh, come now, Gerald, that is too much," said his friend. "Since you are married I am glad that you love your wife. It would be tragic without that. But I assure you it has been a shock to me. Nothing but my friendship for you would have stood the strain. To keep your marriage a secret from Reine was bad enough; to consult her about the furnishing of your house when she did not know that it was yours was the refinement of cruelty; but to jest about her so unfeelingly is worse than all."

"You are too modest, Frank," said Gerald, "or you would not think the jest unkind. You are quite capable of making the dear girl happy. I believe that our lives have been tuned on too high a pitch. We have asked too much of fate. My happiness now would be complete if you two should marry. It is a charming idea. You have been unmindful of your opportunities or it would have occurred to you before."

"You recommend it as the easiest way for yourself out of a difficulty," said Frank severely. "You know that you have treated Reine unfairly. You have a guilty conscience, as you have shown by your cowardice in hastening your marriage and concealing it from

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her. What was your object, and what is to be the sequel of it?"

"Reine knows that her place in my heart can never be occupied by another," said Gerald. "Our friendship will not be affected by my marriage. She will have a new friend in Massey, and she will forgive me the concealment of it when she learns the unexpected events that led to it. It is impossible to explain the seemingly incredible in letters. When she sees Massey she will understand."

"I hope you will not be disappointed," said Bumstead dryly. "I wash my hands of all responsibility. She expects you to-night for our Wednesday evening symposium."

"Of course I cannot come," he answered regretfully. "Will you not give her my love and assure her that I will come to-morrow or next day?"

"I will say so if you like," replied Frank, "but I will invent no excuses for you, neither will I be the one to crush her with the first news of the unwelcome surprise you have been preparing for her."

"You are too tragic," said Gerald impatiently. "I expect the congratulations of my friends, not their reproaches."

"I wish you joy, as the country people say," responded Frank. "I hope you will be happy, for my happiness is bound up in yours."

"Dear old fellow," said Gerald. "Why should I

not be happy? I have the most charming little wife in the world."

Frank sighed. "I hope you will like the house," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Since you gave me *carte blanche* I succeeded pretty well, I think. Of course the proportions of a small flat do not allow of much in the way of severe effects; but variety is what I aimed at. The parlor is Turkish, the dining-room Roman, the bed-rooms Moorish. Reine chose the colors for the hangings, as you wished. I told her it was for a young married couple, friends of yours."

He said this with severe emphasis. Gerald looked uncomfortable. "It was rather shabby to deceive her," he said.

"It was abominable," said Frank. "She will not forgive me for my share in it. All our happy days are at an end."

"I will make peace for you," replied Gerald. "I will bear all the blame."

"You will have enough to do to make your own peace," was the answer. "You cannot afford to be magnanimous."

"You are a dismal prophet," said Gerald. "Massey will cheer you up."

Massey was waiting for her husband at the hall-door near the elevator. The softened glow of electric lights made their little apartment gay.

"Aren't they dreadful?" exclaimed Bumstead apologetically, referring to this illumination. "I begged the

landlord to remove or qualify them. They are too obtrusively modern. You will understand, Mrs. Maynard, that I am not responsible. I wanted lanterns hung by silver chains here, and Etruscan lamps there, and iron sconces yonder. But how do you like the rest?"

"It is lovely," answered Massey, "I am delighted. As for candles, Aunt Julia has arranged them on the dinner-table with the flowers. Her maid has prepared a hot dinner for us, Gerald, in our own house."

Gerald pressed her hand as he led her about with him while he examined everything with the eye of a connoisseur. Mr. and Mrs. Vance met them in the dining-room. A hasty survey had convinced the latter that the domestic arrangements were, as she had foreseen, lamentably deficient. Her money had been spent for moth-eaten Turkish rugs, piles of cushions, tall flower jars, arabesque screens, and antique couches, while the kitchen dresser was bare and the pantry shelves empty. She made a list of necessities, promising herself to supply them in a quiet way with Massey's assistance, leaving the master of the house to the enjoyment of what he loudly proclaimed to be a perfect combination of the practical with the æsthetic.

Mr. Vance looked in vain for a seat having sufficient solidity to support him, and one that did not invite a plunge into downy cushions. He found at last in the dining-room a solid arm-chair, of a square, uncomfortable build, which Bumstead explained was modeled

after those in which the Roman ladies sat at meals while their husbands reclined on couches placed about the table.

"I am glad you omitted the couches," said Mr. Vance. "Modern comforts appeal to me more forcibly than archæological details. Why must we of the nineteenth century model ourselves after the antique?"

Bumstead looked pained at the implied criticism of his taste.

"It is not that," he replied, "but you will understand that some idea is necessary in the arrangement of a room. You would not wish it to be without meaning any more than you would care to listen to the conversation of idiots. An idea in decoration, as I understand it, implies a reference to the historic or to the artistic sense. Perfection in exquisite detail may suggest nothing but the absolute value of beauty. But pray remember that I was limited both as to space and as to funds. I considered that a correct reproduction of antique models was the most available method of intelligent arrangement here."

"It is all charming," declared Massey, who sat radiant at the head of her table, where she had assigned each a place. "How clever you are, and how kind to do so much! We shall always be grateful to you."

Mr. Bumstead's severity relaxed under her genial influence, and he partook of the dainty viands with an

unæsthetic avidity which left no opportunity for sustained conversation. Massey's happiness communicated itself to her relatives, and Gerald's smile was in ready response to hers.

When they returned to the parlor, Mrs. Vance produced an iron crane which her husband hung in the chimney after making an appropriate speech. Mr. Bumstead murmured an unnoticed protest against the incongruity of this article of furniture. He had concealed the fireplace with a Turkish banner, rich in gold embroidery. Since Massey preferred the crane with its kettle and a snapping fire on the hearth, Mr. Bumstead solemnly mounted a chair and hung the banner on the opposite wall.

He paused a moment from this height to survey the room. The decorations were perfectly satisfactory. His eye fell on the group before the fire. Mr. Vance sat in the Roman arm-chair, which he had insisted upon introducing into the Turkish parlor. His wife, content with a pile of cushions, sat beside him, leaning upon the arm of his chair. The faces of both reflected a serene contentment. Gerald and Massey occupied a low divan, and Bumstead detected the fact that, under shelter of the embroidered cushions, Gerald's arm enfolded Massey's waist. Their eyes were bent upon the leaping blaze that celebrated the hanging of the crane.

Mr. Bumstead descended, and stiffly made his adieux. Outside the rain beat in his face, driven by the September gale. Life seemed to him to be full of sharp



contrasts in which justice had no part. Gerald Maynard, who had offended by marrying contrary to the wishes of his friends, was happy in his transgression, while he, Frank Bumstead, although conscious of rectitude, looked forward to the evening which he was to spend with Reine Chapman as a season of purgatorial torment.

## CHAPTER VII.

GERALD had been unwilling to reveal his intended marriage to the young artist, not so much from the fear of her displeasure as from the certainty that his resolution would not be proof against a dissuading glance from her eyes. Now that Massey was his wife, and every day taught him a new argument in favor of the reasonableness of his growing love for her, he wondered that he had been so weak ; but the web of deception which he had woven possessed an uncomfortable tenacity of texture. Reine must learn the truth, but he dreaded to make the revelation which grew more formidable in its consequences the more he considered it. She would be vexed and hurt, and he dreaded her anger, turned, for the first time, against himself. His choice had always been to avoid unpleasant and difficult things. The æsthetic temperament must pay for the delights of sensitive perception by suffering in proportion as it enjoys, and Gerald, realizing his weakness, had instinctively repulsed sorrow and remorse when they threatened him. His conscience was free from morbid self-accusation. His rules of ethics were the guides of his daily life. He lived correctly, and he

thought sanely. He was in sympathy with the great moral teachers of the world. He had never been troubled by the consciousness of original sin, which so many receive as a birthright of evil destiny from which there is no escape. Never until now when he thought with anxiety of Reine's reproachful displeasure, had he comprehended how Adam, in the parable of the creation, trembled before his Maker. He felt degraded by the unaccustomed sense of guilt which he tried in vain to escape by laughing at the trivial nature of its cause. He sent Reine a newspaper containing a marked notice of his marriage, and with it a great bouquet of Jacqueminot roses—her favorite flowers. He wished her to be prepared for his news before he should make the call which he had promised and delayed. His time was no longer freely at his own disposal. Mrs. Vance and Massey contrived to surround him with daily and hourly engagements. Before he was aware of it he was bound hand and foot by a network of implied obligations and responsibilities against which he chafed like Gulliver in pigmy bonds. When he was out Massey was left alone. It was natural that she should inquire eagerly as to his every movement. He felt that it was unpardonable that he should resent anything from her. It was easier to submit to the inquisition of love than to cloud the days of the honeymoon with disagreement.

It was early in the week following their return to the city that he sent Reine the bunch of roses ; but several

days elapsed before he could secure a vacant hour at the time when Reine would be at home and at leisure ; and at the last it became necessary that he should excuse himself from a family dinner at the Vances, given in honor of himself and his bride, to meet whom a distinguished naval officer had been invited with his wife. Gerald found that all his diplomacy was needed to support himself against Mrs. Vance's insistence and Massey's expressed disappointment. It was necessary to burden his conscience with a tissue of lies concerning an important business engagement. When at last he escaped from the house where Massey stood in her evening dress, drawing on her gloves, with an evident inclination to tears, Gerald flung back his head with a sigh of relief. He walked the distance to his destination, a matter of five or six miles, feeling a need to expend in physical exercise the pent-up energies of his mind. He wished that he could climb Bald Mountain, running and leaping from ledge to ledge, to challenge the moonrise upon its summit. The close contact of city life oppressed him. He wished that he might find Reine, as she had always been, a soothing influence and a cheerful inspiration. Why need he confess anything? Why need she be *exigeante* if he did? Why was life so strenuous and high-pitched? Could no one learn to cultivate the philosophic calm which is the lost secret of happiness?

The janitor admitted him into the small red brick apartment house whose well-known stairs he ascended

two at a time. A summons from below through a speaking-tube at the same time gained him entrance, by a mysterious application of a hidden force, to the untended door of the Chapmans' apartment. He entered the parlor which was also Reine's studio, and he paced about nervously, sure that her appearance would not be long delayed. He stared at her pictures, noticing some good studies made during the summer. He fingered the trinkets on her desk, and started to see the paper he had sent her in its wrapper, unopened and unread. He opened it to the list of marriage notices and turned with it in his hand as Reine entered smiling.

"Frank told me you were in town," she said. "Where have you been hiding all this time? I expected you surely Wednesday night as usual, but was twice disappointed."

She gave him her hand with the firm clasp of good fellowship which he knew so well. Her face told him that she was delighted to see him.

"Oh, Reine, can you forgive me——" he began.

"Forgive you, my darling, of course," she answered. "Frank and I did very well without you."

Mrs. Chapman came hurrying in from the kitchen, which was not beyond the sound of conversation in the parlor. She patted her hands, which were white with flour, lightly together, as she said, "How do you do, Gerald."

Gerald kissed the cheek which she turned unrespon-

sively towards him. She was a thin, faded little woman, with undecided features and colorless hair; but her eyes had once been magnificent. Reine inherited them.

"I wish you would be more careful, Reine," she said nervously. "Why should you call Gerald your darling? It sounds very badly."

Reine shrugged her shoulders.

"Mamma has become an avenging Mrs. Grundy of late," she said. "Her character of chaperone oppresses her. Fancy my needing a chaperone!"

"You will need your mother's care till you are married, Reine," said Mrs. Chapman stiffly. "We cannot be too careful of appearances."

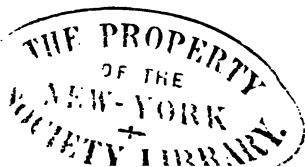
"But we do not mean to marry, do we, Gerald?" said Reine. "Must we be governed by the Young Person's rules of decorum until we are seventy?"

"Men can do as they like," said her mother, "but women must not acquire the emancipated manners of modern society if they wish to be admired and respected."

Reine gave Gerald a look of smiling protest, but he did not show the sympathetic amusement which she expected. His face was grave and anxious. He tried to speak carelessly as he asked, "Would it please you, Reine, if I should marry?"

His tone was constrained, and he blushed as he spoke.

"Are you thinking of it?" she asked quickly.



"I have thought of it," he replied, twisting the newspaper in his fingers.

Reine colored and looked down.

"You are not attempting a proposal to Reine?" asked Mrs. Chapman, with a nervous laugh.

Gerald shook his head.

"Oh, mother," cried Reine, "how can you? Gerald and I have debated the subject *pro* and *con* a dozen times. Why do we not fall in love when we love each other very dearly? Why do we not wish to marry when we cannot bear to be long parted? That question brings its own answer, we have concluded. We cherish our affection too tenderly to put it to so severe a test. Is it not so, Gerald? Was not that our deliberate conclusion?"

She had a way when she spoke of mingling her words with half-audible ripples of laughter, but her eyes were fixed anxiously on Gerald's face, and the blushes that dyed her cheeks and brow showed that the gayety of her tone was painfully assumed.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "Nothing can change our affection for each other. You would not be jealous, Reine, if I should marry some pretty girl who would be your friend? You trust me too much for that?"

"Jealous!" she cried ironically, growing suddenly pale as she faced him. "How could I be? What right should I have? Who is she, Gerald?"

"Oh, Reine!" he groaned. "It seems both stupid

and wicked now to allow this to come as a surprise. Do promise, dearest girl, to forgive me. I could not wait to consult you. I never can write about practical affairs. Letters are always misunderstood. I thought it would be better to wait until I could see you and talk it over. I am still amazed at it myself. It was one of those things that come about outside of one's own volition. I was married the thirtieth of August. I will bring Massey to see you very soon. When you see her you will understand. I hope I can explain——"

"I will leave you to explain it to my mother," Reine answered, in a hollow voice. "She has forgotten that her bread is in the oven. I will go and attend to it, for fear that it may burn."

She left the room, closing the door behind her. The two who were left together stared at each other blankly.

"She will never forgive you," exclaimed Mrs. Chapman, surprised into involuntary frankness.

"Oh, why not?" cried Gerald. "I love her as I have always done. Why need it make any difference?"

"Marriage always makes a difference," said Mrs. Chapman dryly. "Do you think I should have allowed you to visit here as freely as you have always done if you had been a married man? Of course now you will not wish to. You will have other engagements. It may be all for the best; but Reine, of



course, is deeply hurt that you told us nothing of your plans."

"I regret it deeply now," he answered, "but it seemed the easiest way. It was a very sudden thing."

"A case of love at first sight, I suppose," remarked Mrs. Chapman, with growing interest.

"I should never have married," he continued, "if I had thought that I should lose Reine by it, or that there need be any change in our happy friendship. It is something I would not give up for the world. Do you think she is seriously angry?"

"I think it is just as well that you young people should learn a little common sense," replied Mrs. Chapman decidedly. "I have never approved of your friendship for Reine, I must confess it, Gerald. It has been too exaggerated on both sides, as long as you each declared that there was no hint of love-making in it. To outsiders it looked like an engagement. It has prevented Reine from having serious proposals. I will not say that it has been an injury to her, though of course I am anxious to see her well settled in life. This summer, while you were away, she had an offer from a respectable young man in the tea business. It was her first offer, and she is twenty-five; yet she refused him as shortly as if she were a society belle, with a dozen at her feet. I cannot help thinking that if she had known then of your engagement her answer would have been different."

"How could that make any difference?" asked Gerald, strangely agitated by her words, and conscious of indignant scorn for the man in the tea business, who had dared to offer himself to Reine.

"Well, we can never know," sighed Mrs. Chapman. "I hope everything is ordered for the best. Come again some evening, Gerald, and bring your wife to see us."

"You are very kind," he answered, rising to take leave. "I want you to know her. After the first shock of surprise is over, I am sure Reine will realize that nothing can change my affection for her. Please tell her so again from me."

"That is nonsense," said Mrs. Chapman severely. "Of course you will always be friends; but all talk about love and affection is decidedly out of place from a married man to an unprotected girl like Reine. You must see yourself that the situation is changed. I hope you will visit us often, but I should prefer to have you bring your wife when you come."

Gerald stood looking at her with eyes which had the brilliancy of unshed tears.

"You are cruel," he said. "I thought you loved me and understood me. There is a certain sort of conventionality which is base and vulgar. It looks for evil and searches it out in holy places. There never could be a shadow of evil between me and Reine, and yet I love her and shall always love her far better than my wife."

He left the room, while Mrs. Chapman started up with a horrified exclamation, and stood looking after him with a frowning brow for a moment. Then she went into the kitchen. Reine sat by the hearth with her head bent upon her hands, disregarding the odor of burning bread which rose from the closed oven.

"Oh, Reine, you have not looked at the bread," she exclaimed. "It serves me right for baking at night, which is the most shiftless thing I could possibly do ; but what can be done when the yeast will not work, and you insist on a home-made loaf?"

Reine remained as unmoved by reproach as Alfred the Great under similar circumstances. Her mother gave her a keen glance while depositing the charred semblance of loaves upon the table.

"Why did you run away?" she asked. "It looked as if you took the news greatly to heart. Gerald will think so. Men are so vain."

Reine pushed back the masses of auburn hair which had fallen loose about her forehead, and lifted her eyes to her mother's face.

"I am angry, grieved, and hurt," she said. "Gerald may think what he chooses. Of course I shall not tell him so. I will learn to dissemble, as women must. What fools we are!"

"Oh, Reine, you are in love with him after all," exclaimed her mother in awestruck tones. Reine made no response or denial. "If I had only known it, I could have contrived a marriage between you, any one

of a dozen times in the last two years. But I believed what you both said about your love of art, and your disinterested friendship for each other. It may be all for the best, for Gerald is too poor to marry a poor girl. I suppose his wife has money, and that he married her for that on the impulse of the moment. It may be the making of him. He is just the sort of a man who needs a wife for a balance wheel."

"He should love his wife," said Reine. "He is the sort of a man who will wreck his life and hers unless he loves her."

She spoke impulsively, and then regretted her words, but her mother had not heeded them.

"I think I will invite Mr. Smith to dinner next Sunday," she said. "We counted on Gerald, you know, and I have ordered the turkey." Mr. Smith was the young man in the tea business.

Reine gave her a look of reproach, and then entered her studio and picked up from the floor the newspaper which Gerald had held folded in his hands. Her eyes fell upon the notice of his marriage. "At Suffolk, August the thirtieth, to Massey Hollister, adopted daughter of Robert and Julia Vance."

Reine sat late in her room that night before her toilet table, leaning her elbow on its muslin cushion and interrogating her pale face in the mirror. She loved him, and she must give him up, and it was by her own fault that it had happened, for, if a man had ever laid the wealth of his being at a woman's feet, he had at

hers. She had not repulsed the gift, but she had misunderstood it. She had agreed in his interpretation of their friendship as a unique and perfect example of disinterested affection, free from the selfish alloy of ordinary love. If she had known her own heart she could have won him at any time by a look. Their minds supplemented each other. Their natures were counter-parts. How rash they had been to defy the common fate, and to grasp at something as dazzling and perishable as a moonlit fountain spray.

"We have been two children playing at love without understanding it," she thought. She opened a velvet, bound volume of Omar Khayyam, which Gerald had given her. It lay upon her toilet-table where her Bible should have been. Reine did not read the Bible, for Gerald did not believe in it as a guide to faith, and she did not admire it, as he did, for its literary qualities. His views were hers by a process of unconcious transmittal, but she often lacked the cheerful philosophy of his interpretations.

"We are no other than a moving row  
Of Magic-Shadow shapes that come and go  
Round with this Sun-illuminated Lantern held  
In Midnight by the Master of the Show—"

she read.

The verse of the Persian poet was a cry of pain. Some woman must have deceived him, she thought; and at the same time an unreasoning anger against Massey Hollister arose in her mind. Who was this

stranger to oppose her slender claim of a summer's acquaintance against the tie which years had woven between Gerald and herself? and how could she expect to possess his heart when it had long been wholly Reine's?

"Of course he does not love her. Why did he marry her?" she asked herself, feeling a growing sense of injury and wrong. Gerald had spoiled her life and his, and the future for both looked dark and threatening. "Why did he do it? How could he do it?" she whispered, and her white image in the mirror repeated the question.

## CHAPTER VIII.

GERALD reached his home late. He was full of restless anxiety, and he dreaded to meet Massey's inquiring, perhaps reproachful look ; but, as he entered her dainty boudoir, a spirit of peace and contentment seemed wafted to him with the faint odor of violets that filled the air. The light was dim, and his footfall on the thick rugs made no sound. Massey knelt upon her cushioned *prie-dieu*, her prayer-book open before her, and he head bent upon her folded hands. Her white silk dressing-gown picturesquely defined her graceful figure. Her soft brown hair fell in heavy braids to her knees. An impulse of admiring affection stirred tumultuously in Gerald's breast. He knelt beside her, and clasped her waist. Massey lifted her head with a smile. Her eyes were dim from the pressure of her fingers upon them, and they had, for the moment, a far-away, abstracted look. Gerald took her hand and bent his head over it, kissing her fingers.

"You must say your prayers to me now," he said. Massey continued to smile. She did not catch his meaning.

"I am your highest love, am I not?" he said, "and God is love."

"Oh, Gerald, how profane," she cried, rising to her feet.

"I do not mean it so," he answered. "What other God is there? When you pray is it not to an ideal, transcendent love? Where have you seen that love embodied? Is it not a spiritualized and exalted projection of the highest human love you have the power of feeling? Have you not bestowed that dearest real love of your heart upon my unworthy self?"

Massey seated herself upon a cushioned lounge and clasped her hands nervously upon her knee, looking up at her husband as he stood before her.

"You hurt me by speaking so lightly of such things," she said. "I have never dared to talk with you about religion. I am afraid of your opinions. Oh, Gerald, they are all wrong."

"Do not begin to talk religion now, my pretty saint," he said, "but love, love, love. That is the sum of the Commandments: and love me, Massey."

"Oh, I do," she cried, with a sudden rush of tears to her eyes. "That is why it hurts me so."

"Are you afraid that I will suffer in flames for my unbelief?" he asked.

"Oh, Gerald, of course not," she answered, "but do go with me some day to hear Father Bleecker. He will explain how we suffer even in this world when we lose our spiritual birthright."

"They have atrocious music at his church, but I will go with you if you like," he said. "By the way,



when is your uncle coming, Massey? Do you ever hear from him? Anton Blavatsky I mean."

Massey had looked puzzled; then she answered quickly, "Oh, no, I am not likely to hear from him. He will make his regular concert tour this winter, I suppose, and we will go to hear him. I delight in his fame, and I like to think that he is my uncle, although he does not care to recall that fact. He quarreled with my mother when she married an American, and never spoke or wrote to her again. He would not visit her when on her death-bed. I cannot forgive him for that. My mother was the gentlest, sweetest woman, but she could not speak of her brother's unkindness to my father without resentment."

Gerald's expression changed. He turned away and began to pace the floor in agitation.

"What is it, dear?" asked Massey in surprise.

"I do not feel well," he answered, throwing the window open and leaning into the night. The roar of the city was subdued into comparative silence. The breeze came fresh from the sea. Massey stood beside him making anxious inquiries. Where had he been? What had worried him? Was it his head that ached?

"Yes, and my heart too," he replied, turning into the room and flinging himself on the lounge.

"Do tell me, Gerald, what has happened," Massey urged, kneeling beside him.

"I am so disappointed," he answered. "You know that my music is my life. I hoped that your uncle

could help me ; that his influence would give me the start I need now when it is so important. It is only the first step that costs, but that is so hard to make. Do you think that I enjoy being an object of charity and living on Mr. Vance's money ? I feel degraded at the thought, as if I had been bought and sold."

"How can you if you love me?" cried Massey. "The money is mine, and it is my greatest pleasure to give it to you. Why should you deny me that happiness?"

Gerald buried his head among the cushions. He recalled the day when he had lain upon the mountain top crushing the sweet-smelling mint between his hands. His feeling now was the same as then, the rebellion of a wild creature caught in a net. He looked up at his wife with a tragic expression.

"Oh, Massey, I wish you were not so beautiful and so dear," he said. "When I look at you I cannot resent being made a dupe. I must feel a spaniel-like gratitude to the hand which has inflicted my chastisement."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that you must love me, and be tender to me," he answered, drawing her arms about his neck.

"Oh, Gerald, I would give my life for you," she said, blushing for the fervor of her declaration. "I want to be a helpful wife. You must let me share your anxieties, and not shut me out from them. I will see my Uncle Blavatsky when he comes. I will kneel at

his feet and beg for a reconciliation. I will be as charming as possible, and he will help you—I am sure he will. Some day you will be more famous than he."

Gerald sat up and disengaged himself from her arms. "I have an idea," he said. "Run get me my portfolio, dear. I had the whole of a sonata mapped out in my head this morning. I forgot it during the evening, but now I begin to realize it again."

He went to the piano and struck a few chords, jotting down the notes. A fever of composition seized him. He forgot Massey, Reine, and the whole world. He was alone in a universe of melodious sound where waves of harmony ebbed and flowed; where he was a creator, arranging a new order of things out of pre-existing elements, choosing, sifting, building up, exercising the power which most closely reflects the likeness of God in man made after His image. When Massey spoke, her words were unheard. When she left him, he did not notice her absence. The pale light of dawn was stealing into the window when he wrote the last line, and looked with loving satisfaction at the piled-up sheets which represented the artist's dearest possession—the fruit of a successful inspiration.

Mrs. Vance bore the burden of Massey's new existence upon her heart. All the affairs of the little household were submitted to her judgment, and, like a beneficent genius, she oiled the wheels which kept them moving

smoothly and satisfactorily. She furnished a couple of servants trained in her own kitchen. Gerald never knew how much of the artistic tranquillity which he enjoyed in his home was owing to this minor circumstance, and to the friendly vigilance which shielded Massey from care. Mrs. Vance was especially determined that Massey should begin right in a social way, but to this purpose Gerald was an invincible obstacle. He was willing to be charming to a chance guest introduced at any hour at his table, but to give a dutiful attention to the demands of society was beyond his wish. Mrs. Vance did not belong to the fashionable or ultra aristocratic set, but she had a circle of friends whose acquaintance was well worth cultivating, literary men and women, foreigners of distinction, naval officers and their wives, whom she had learned to know in the friendly intimacy of American colonial life in foreign ports ; and although there was an absence of acquaintance with the shibboleths of what is called society, there was nothing Bohemian in this little world, which was marked, on the contrary, by an old-fashioned dignity which gave grace to its functions. Its standards were high though comprehensive.

To introduce Massey with propriety Mrs. Vance arranged that she should give a formal reception, and enough invitations were issued to crowd her little rooms. Gerald gave his consent on condition that he should hear nothing of the details of preparation which seemed to him to be out of proportion to the end in

view. He thought that one's friends should come as individuals, not as undistinguishable hordes.

"You need do nothing but stand beside Massey to receive," said Mrs. Vance. "That is no great hardship, I am sure."

"I would rather do anything else," he said, but he agreed to lend himself to the necessities of the hour.

It happened, unfortunately, that he was called to Brooklyn on the morning of the important day by a summons from Frank Bumstead, who declared himself to be ill of a fever, and languishing for the presence of his friend. Gerald hastened to his assistance, promising an early return. The hour came, and the guests arrived, but Gerald did not appear. Massey received her friends supported by her adopted parents. She was overcome by anxiety and disappointment, and Mrs. Vance was furiously angry.

"Massey will be ill from nervous strain," she said to her husband, when she could find the opportunity. "You must find Gerald and bring him home. He must show himself at least in the course of the evening. His absence is most mortifying."

Mr. Vance, armed with Mr. Bumstead's address, sallied forth in quest of the recreant husband. He found the invalid propped up in an easy-chair before a blazing fire, waited on by an indulgent mother, and partaking heartily of Russian tea and fancy cakes ; but Gerald was not in attendance.

"He spent the morning and took lunch with us," Frank explained. "He did me a great deal of good. I was in bed when he came, and now you see I am able to sit up and take a little nourishment. I have no idea where he has gone. He proposed making a tour of the music shops in the hope of finding a publisher for a sonata. He probably dined with Reine Chapman, and he may have gone later to the meeting of the *Fin-de-Siècle* Club. This is the night for it."

Mr. Vance informed himself further. Bumstead's description of the young artist gave him much uneasiness. He hoped that his son-in-law had not left Massey's side to dine with an emancipated young woman with auburn hair. Bumstead showed him a life-size water-color of Reine painted by herself. It was an impressionistic study not at all flattering to the subject, Frank told him. Mr. Vance was chiefly impressed by the floating aureole of reddish-brown locks, unconfined by fashionable rules, and vaguely defined by the daring brush.

"She is prettier, much prettier," said Frank, critically. "It is a dreadful daub. Gerald has a better and more carefully-finished likeness."

Mr. Vance, being unwilling to consider Miss Chapman in the matter, preferred to seek Gerald at the *Fin-de-Siècle* Club; and, following Bumstead's minute directions, he ascended three flights of dark, precipitous stairs which led between two large business houses to an upper attic room. Here the sound of a violin and

a noise of shuffling feet announced that the club was in session. He opened the door and stumbled over a projecting sill into the presence of a dozen young men who stared at him in surprise, and greeted him with a chorus of would-be witty remarks. Gerald sat on a table holding a sandwich of bread and cheese in one hand, and a mug of beer in the other. A young man, who was executing a composition of Chopin's with fine effect upon the violin, occupied a high stool placed in the center of the same table, and from this elevated position he looked calmly down through ascending clouds of tobacco smoke upon his uproarious and inattentive audience. Two of the men were waltzing, with exaggerated motions, in time to the music, waving an empty beer-mug in their disengaged hands.

"By Jupiter, it is my father-in-law," cried Gerald, at the first view of Mr. Vance's dignified figure, and incongruously undignified entrance.

"Hail to the chief," sang one young man, while the musician, descending from his perch without ceasing his fiddling, said with a polite bow, "Happy to meet you, sir; allow me to offer you my seat, the only one in the room."

"We are not always thus, but we are giving Maynard an ovation to-night," explained a tall young artist with a drooping blond mustache, a man whose signature was prized by connoisseurs of painting. "Maynard has just confessed to us the fact of his marriage, and, to counteract the shock, he has stood treat for the

crowd. I regret that the beer is all gone. May I offer you a piece of cheese and a pipe?"

Gerald placed the stool upon the floor, and invited his father-in-law to occupy it with a whimsical look of of deprecating inquiry at his severely indignant face.

"I am not acquainted with many of my son-in-law's friends," he said. "I thought I would look in upon you since he prefers your Club-meeting to a society reception. Very good taste, I am sure."

"Hear, hear!" cried the violinist, ending his performance by drawing forth a succession of discordant shrieks and groans from his instrument which caused his hearers to place their fingers in their ears.

"I had forgotten that this was the night of Massey's reception," said Gerald, in a low voice, realizing in a moment the enormity of his offense.

"She is standing up there alone among strangers fretting herself ill with anxiety for you," said Mr. Vance.

"I will go home at once," cried Gerald. "I have forgotten an important engagement, my dear fellows. *Au revoir*. I am very sorry," he continued, as he followed Mr. Vance into the street. "I hope Massey will forgive me. I warned her that I never keep my engagements."

"Who is Miss Reine Chapman?" asked Mr. Vance, by way of reply.

"My dearest friend," Gerald answered, with a defiant gleam in his eyes.



"You dined with her, Mr. Bumstead told me."

"Yes. I used to spend months at her house. She has a very careful mother. It is eminently proper to do anything that Mrs. Chapman will allow."

"It is necessary, however, to consider appearances," said Mr. Vance.

"I shall never consent to modify my actions to please a hypercritical Philistinism," said Gerald. "The world is full of false judgments. It is degrading to consider them."

"Make Massey happy. It is all I ask," rejoined Mr. Vance, in a tone tremulous with feeling.

"I will try to do that," replied Gerald. "She is very dear to me."

## CHAPTER IX.

SINCE Gerald did not care for society Massey found it a bore. At concerts and operas he would appear at her side ; but he shunned dinners and receptions so persistently that he was threatened with social condemnation.

"Massey might as well be a widow," Mrs. Vance complained. In her secret heart she considered that the independent position of a young, rich, and beautiful widow is superior to that of a wife who must maintain in any respect an apologetic attitude concerning her husband. Gerald was personally very agreeable to his mother-in-law, but she disapproved of him thoroughly. The fact that he was a charming companion, with a sort of whimsical gentleness and irresponsible good humor, did not blind her to his faults which were what she had early perceived in him, and consisted chiefly of an inability to adapt himself to external conditions. If he were not to blame, the existing constitution of society was at fault. He was out of harmony with his environment.

When Mrs. Vance was in a kindly humor towards him, she spoke of him as a sort of spiritualized Dona-

tello, a creature of a different order from that of commonplace humanity, and one who suffered from the application of ordinary standards. She did not worry, as Massey did, because he had no definite creed.

"He will come round to that," she said to her niece. "It is the fashion for young men to be skeptical. Wait till they grow older, and feel the touch of pain, and the yearning for a rock to lean on."

"But Gerald will never change his opinions on that point," said Massey. "You have no idea how immovably determined he can be. He has a certain look in his eyes, and a way of compressing his lips when I try to influence him. It is so hard for me to feel that there is one subject on which we cannot be united."

"Do not take it so much to heart," replied her aunt. "As long as he is moral and moderately industrious do not grieve over his condition. It might be so much worse."

"I do not know," said Massey seriously. "It seems to me that irreligion is worse than immorality."

Mrs. Vance looked shocked. "You know nothing about it," she said. "Theoretically you may be right, for, on the face of it, religion is higher than morality; but practically religion does not concern our modern life at all. Our dearest friends may be thoroughgoing skeptics and what difference does it make as long as we avoid discussing the subject?"

"It makes every difference to me," responded Massey drearily. "It is the one sorrow of my life."

Mrs. Vance felt a deeper sympathy for Massey than she would allow to appear. She was conscious of a lack in Gerald's character which could be traced to the want of a guiding faith in a higher law than that of his own intelligence. There was something hard and cold at the bottom of his charming geniality. He had a way of exhausting his friendships, sucking the vital juices, as it were, from a pleasant experience, and flinging away the rind of remembrance like that of a dried orange. She noticed this in the way he spoke of absent friends.

"I met Miss Linton on the street to-day," he said one evening. "I supposed that she was dead by this time."

"She has not been ill?" asked Mrs. Vance.

"Oh, no, but she is old enough to die," he answered laughing. "Instead of that I hear that she is to be married. Only fancy!"

"It is not the fashion to be married young," remarked Massey. "If I had waited think how much wiser I should have been; too wise to marry at all, no doubt."

"Too wise to marry me," he responded. "Miss Linton did not look well. I had forgotten that she was so faded. At Suffolk there is always a glamour in the air. Every woman seems beautiful and attractive. In the city my standards are higher. Perhaps she suffered by being in the company of Mrs. Grayling who appeared particularly forward and ill-mannered. It seems that Miss Linton's *fiancé* is a cousin of the gay widow,

and Miss Linton is at present her guest. She invited me to call and bring my wife."

"Then we must make it a point to go," said Massey. "They were very polite to me last summer."

This call was made one evening. Mrs. Grayling lived in a house of her own in a quarter that had long since been deserted by fashion. She kept three or four servants, and drove in an antiquated carriage drawn by two sleek, sleepy horses. She went to a Methodist chapel, and was looked up to as a social power in her own circle. Miss Linton had superior pretensions to social importance, but they were nullified by extreme poverty. It was convenient for her to visit the friendly widow, and to drive about upon comfortable cushions. She was able to adapt herself easily to circumstances, and she was amused rather than shocked at the various minor defects in the constitution of life at — Place.

Mrs. Grayling admired and made much of her. It was she who had persuaded Miss Linton to accept her cousin, a wealthy widower of fifty. He was a silent man, who had a bald head and wore spectacles. He read the *Herald* in the evening when he sat with his *fiancée* in his cousin's parlor.

Miss Linton found Gerald's call a welcome distraction. Massey was greeted warmly, memories of Suffolk were revived, and after Gerald had tried the grand piano, Mrs. Grayling insisted on showing her guests over the house. Gerald professed amazement, tem-

pered only by politeness, at the style of its furnishing. He entered each room with a hesitating, awe-struck manner, as if uncertain what new horror he should encounter. Miss Linton was amused by his smothered ejaculations of dismay. Mrs. Grayling took them for approval. She showed him her plaster statuettes, embroidered lambrequins, and gaudy modern tapestries, with a pleased dependence upon the sympathy of a critical understanding. A stuffed semblance of a cat with owlish glass eyes looked from a frame upon the wall above a table piled with albums and stereopticon views. "Wonderful!" exclaimed Gerald under his breath. He could not refrain from giving suggestions as to the disposition of portières and the rearrangement of furniture here and there, and for this Mrs. Grayling professed ardent gratitude.

"I like to please the taste of those who are really æsthetic," she said. "I know your ideas are perfect. We shall come very soon to see your pretty house. We should have called first, I suppose, but I am very grateful that you were not formal with old friends."

Gerald cut short the adieus in order to catch a car that jingled past. When he found himself seated within it he turned to his wife with a sigh of relief.

"I have been in torment," he said. "We will go to see Rudolph Blackman. He will furnish me with an antidote. He has not called upon you, but never mind. I did not send him our cards. He has a right to be offended."

"Who is he, and where does he live?" asked Massey.

"He keeps bachelor hall in a handsome flat near the Park," replied Gerald. "He is a friend of mine. He will be pleased to see you. It will be a special favor to him, for he counts a day lost that does not furnish a new sensation. Experience, he says, is the end of life. There is hardly an attainable experience that he has not tried. He is no Sybarite. He takes the bitter as willingly as the sweet. He wishes to know, to feel, and to test everything by personal consciousness."

"I shall not like him. He must be very selfish," said Massey.

"Most women like him. He is handsome, eccentric, and very rich," said Gerald.

Rudolph Blackman was at home, and alone, and he received Gerald and his wife with enthusiasm, expressing ardent gratitude for Massey's condescension in visiting his humble home. Massey laughed at this, for her wildest dreams had never pictured an approach to the beauty and magnificence of his surroundings. Gerald sank into a chair contrived with the most luxurious adaptation to bodily ease, as was every article of furniture, and he looked about him with the expression of a worshipper at a shrine.

"Show Massey about, Rudolph," he said, "and let me take it all in once more in quiet. We have been in one of the circles of the Inferno, to wit, an upholstered parlor full of stuffed cats and gilt albums."

Rudolph laughed, and offered Massey his arm.

"What a pity to be a slave to beauty," he said, "a weak, artistic creature open to enjoyment only on one side of his nature. I should delight, no doubt, in the experience that he has found so heart-rending."

"It is no wonder that you can be indifferent to such things when you can always return to this beautiful place," said Massey. "It is like a museum and a picture gallery, and a palace in the Arabian Nights. The only thing lacking is a roc's egg."

"I must provide myself with one," replied Rudolph smiling. "I am not often here. This is one of my days at home. Last night I slept in a lodging-house in the slums."

Massey looked horrified.

"Do not shrink from me," he said. "The physical contamination has been counteracted by antiseptic ablutions and perfumed baths. The moral influence remains. I was reviewing it in reverie as you came in, trying to keep real and vivid in my memory the foul degradation which sin and ugliness can cause."

"How can you care to do such things?" asked Massey.

"It happened to occur to me as a particular thing which I had not done," he replied. "That is reason enough for doing it. You would hardly believe, unless you could have special experience, how limited our range of sensations is. The harp of life has only seven strings, and the variations on those become monotonous after a while. It horrifies me to realize that I may out-



live my power of keen appreciation. There is always one new sensation in reserve, the shuffling off of this mortal coil ; but, although that can be done in a hundred ways, it is necessary to choose one, and who would voluntarily reduce the pyramid of life to its vanishing point, and topple thereby into eternal nothingness ? ”

Massey withdrew her hand from the arm of her host. She made no reply, but moved about, gazing admiringly at the exquisite objects of art which adorned the rooms. Rudolph followed with an apt word of explanation now and then. She paused in front of an illuminated picture of the Virgin, before which, in a lamp hung by silver chains, perfumed oil was burning. A heavy gold rosary, each bead of which was exquisitely chased, hung near by with an ivory crucifix attached. Massey pointed to this shrine. “ Are you a Roman Catholic ? ” she asked.

Rudolph shook his head with a look of amusement. “ I am an admirer of every religion and a votary of none,” he answered. “ Man’s ingenuity in new devices is better shown in that phase of his development than in any other. The details are infinite. I fancied that they would furnish me with endless novelty ; but after all there is a monotonous similarity at base. Our primary instincts are necessarily simple.”

Massey found her host tedious and unsympathetic. She was vexed that the influence of Gerald’s friends should be exerted so constantly against the cause of religion. Rudolph read her feelings in her face.

"I shock you by my freedom of speech," he said. "I see in your eyes that mingling of blame and pity with which women regard those who presume to doubt what they believe. No doubt it was with just such a severely regretful air that Isabella the Catholic watched the burning of a heretic in the square at Valladolid. The desire for a good woman's good opinion would influence me more than the terror of the flames."

"I did not mean to show that I blame you," said Massey. "I ought not, I am sure. Gerald is so good, and yet he is not religious. It is a question of individual temperament, he says ; and yet to me it is of such importance that I would gladly die the death of the martyr at the stake if I could be the means of opening his eyes to the truth."

She spoke with self-forgetful earnestness, and there were tears in her eyes ; but the next moment, ashamed of her emotion, she turned aside with a blush. "You will think me very foolish," she added.

"No, no," replied Rudolph, in a tone of genuine feeling. "It is the flowers of religious thought springing up in women's hearts which keep this world from becoming an arid waste. Pray for me sometimes, Mrs. Maynard."

Then he turned to Gerald and broke in upon his reverie by a gay remark, presently ordering fruits and ices for his guests, and entertaining them in an inimitable way while they discussed them. He told amusing anecdotes with the gift of the born *raconteur* who

can adorn the commonplace with interest. He made Massey talk, and drew from Gerald an account of his new musical composition, and the trials of his encounters with heartless publishers. It was late when the hospitable host allowed his guests to depart, sending them home in his own carriage.

"Mr. Blackman is charming after all," said Massey. "Some day we will go again, as he urged, and examine his curios more at leisure."

Gerald shook his head. "Keep your agreeable memory in its perfection," he said, "and never attempt to repeat a pleasant experience. At another time Rudolph might not please you. He is a creature of moods."

"If he were only religious," said Massey. "But then I believe his wife could influence him to do anything that she pleased."

Gerald shrugged his shoulders but made no reply, and Massey felt the crushing force of silence to be weightier than words. She sighed, and turned the conversation into a safer channel.

## CHAPTER X.

GERALD Maynard walked down Broadway one morning with the feeling of a man whose fate hangs in the balance. A publisher had promised to give him his answer in regard to the publication of his sonata. He was in no haste to learn this decision, although he had counted the hours that should bring the important day. He did not wish too soon to exchange his cheerful expectation for a possible disappointment. He walked along, studying the ever-varying flow of the city's life in its great artery of business. The endless procession of faces and figures had as little individuality as a succession of shadows, so quickly were they passed and forgotten. The universal hum and roar in which separate sounds were lost was like the note of a great organ, prolonged by endless repetitions. He turned aside to look into the store windows, which exhibited a hundred novel devices for supplying a luxurious and critical taste. The music shops both attracted and repelled him, for he felt a hopeless longing that his name should grace the covers of the sheets of new music displayed upon the shining counters, or that it should appear as a zigzag autograph beneath the suspended

portrait of the most distinguished musician of the day.

Such a lithograph in Beckwith's window represented a foreign-looking man with a drooping moustache and a leonine sweep of shaggy hair brushed back from the forehead, and it bore the name *Blavatsky*, and the date of his appearance at Music Hall.

"Blavatsky here!" thought Gerald. "It is a happy chance. Massey shall persuade him to endorse my sonata. Perhaps he will play it at a recital. My fortune would be made."

He sprang up the stairs that led to the publisher's office. Mr. Beckwith was busy with a caller, but recognizing the young musician, he nodded with a friendly smile, and shoved a neatly folded package across the table. Gerald turned away to open it, and found among his precious sheets a printed letter of polite rejection. He walked up and down the rear of the room until Mr. Beckwith was alone, and then he approached him eagerly.

"You will not take it?" he asked.

Mr. Beckwith shook his head. "Write me a set of waltzes," he said. "I might be able to do something with that; but a serious composition by an unknown musician is too great a risk."

"Blavatsky is a relative of my wife," said Gerald.

"Indeed? I did not know that you were married," remarked Mr. Beckwith with a languid show of interest.

"Suppose that the great Blavatsky should consent to play my sonata at one of his recitals," suggested Gerald.

"Ah, that is another story," said the publisher. "That would give it vogue at once. I should then be glad to bring it out."

"You will reserve your decision till you hear from me?"

Mr. Beckwith agreed.

Gerald hurried into the street, giving a quick glance at the great man's picture as he passed the window. In front of an art store he encountered Reine Chapman, and he paused to greet her warmly. Reine had only seen him once or twice in the last two months. He felt that he had neglected her inexcusably, and he expected reproof; but she took his arm in silence, and walked beside him with the old air of sympathetic understanding which set his sensitive nerves at rest.

"Ah, Reine, I am glad to see you," he said. "You are looking thin and white. Have you been working too hard?"

"I have been painting my masterpiece. It is hard work, yes," she answered.

"I will bring Massey to see it," he said, with a quick side glance to observe the effect of his words. "I have never found the courage to introduce her to you; and she herself is inclined to stand upon ceremony and wait for you to call. We cannot go on in this way, however, for I miss you, Reine, I grow

hungry for your presence, and when I come to see you your mother inquires for my wife, and implies that without her I am not welcome to her strict sense of propriety."

"My mother wearies me with her sense of propriety," said Reine, with an impatient sigh. "It is hard for an artist to live such a narrow, circumscribed life as mine. I miss you, Gerald, more than I can say. I will call upon your wife if it will be a help to you."

"Come now and take lunch with us," urged Gerald. "That would be so much better than a formal call. I am hurrying home to tell a great piece of news to Massey. Blavatsky is here. He is Massey's uncle, you know. He must be seen at once, and persuaded, by fair means or foul, to play my new sonata at one of his recitals. Beckwith consents to publish it on that condition alone."

"I cannot go now, thank you," said Reine. "I am in my working-day clothes. At the last moment I believe I should shrink from meeting your wife."

He looked pained. "Why should there be an instinctive enmity between you two?" he asked. "It hurts me to perceive it."

"Women are fools, Gerald," said Reine bitterly. "Their emotions are not regulated by the logical sequence which governs those of a man. I understand now just how logical your marriage was. It puzzled me greatly to explain it. I knew you so well. I was sure you could not fall suddenly in love with a pretty face."

"What do you mean?" he asked, blushing.

"What you have just said about Blavatsky explains it," said Reine. "If I had a chance to marry the art critic of the *Daily Forum*, I suppose I should feel it my duty to do so."

"I love Massey, I assure you," he answered in confusion, meeting her look of keen yet kindly observation with a deepening blush.

"I should love my critic if he praised my pictures," said Reine lightly.

"Oh, Reine, you are unkind," he protested.

"No, not to you," she answered. "Unkind to myself, perhaps, to make a jest of what is serious. We have always been perfectly frank with each other. We are suffering now from the concealment and the falsehood you believed necessary to spare my feelings. Why did you not tell me of your ambition, and allow me to share your plans? Could you not trust my disinterested friendship?"

"If I had been planning a mercenary marriage, as you believe, should I not have been ashamed to acknowledge it?" he asked. "Could I make it a subject of discussion with my friends? Would you have sanctioned it?"

"What would we not sacrifice for art?" asked Reine in a trembling voice. "It must always be our dearest love."

She paused and withdrew her hand from his arm.



"I will leave you here and take the Elevated down to the bridge," she added.

"I must see your picture before it goes on exhibition," he said, with averted eyes.

"I have invited some friends to come in at noon and criticise it," she said. "It goes before the committee this afternoon. I am not sure of the work. I have often wished that I might have your advice in the finishing. I have always before this seen my work through your eyes. You know there is always that dreadful moment of self-distrust when the color fades out of it and one fancies it a daub."

"I will go with you now and look at it," he said, with sudden decision.

"Oh, no," she answered, resisting the pleasure she felt. "You must go home to your lunch with the news about Blavatsky."

Gerald's face darkened as if he heard an undertone of meaning in the words.

"I will send a telegram if you will wait for me five minutes," he said. "There is an office near here."

Reine did not refuse. She stood gazing at a florist's window while Gerald sent his telegram, but she did not distinguish the roses from the hyacinths. Gerald's face had a look of strained resolve when he rejoined her.

"You are hurting your conscience for my sake," she said, with gentle regret.

He laughed harshly. "Have you the idea that I am to that extent a hen-pecked husband?" he asked. "I

have hitherto wounded my conscience by yielding too much of my freedom, and sacrificing too much of my past."

Reine began to talk rapidly of her plans for the winter, and of the lessons she meant to take in a celebrated studio. Gerald advised against this, urging that individuality was a higher good than technical perfection. This discussion lasted till they reached their destination.

A company of oddly attired men and women were already assembled in the studio. They greeted the artist with compliment and criticism favorable but sincere. They pronounced the picture a finished work of art to which an added touch would prove a superfluity. The painting represented a girl's head life size bent over a bunch of Jacqueminot roses. The title was *Love*. Gerald joined the group in front of the canvas, but he did not swell the chorus of approbation. He waited till he was left alone with the artist.

"Well?" asked Reine nervously. "Is it good or bad?"

"Where have you learned so much?" he exclaimed.

"You never did anything so good."

She turned away with a faint blush. "Here is a study for a companion piece," she said, holding up a canvas on which was outlined a sketch bearing the title *Jealousy*. The same face was lifted with a look of hopeless despair. The roses had fallen withered from their stems.

"Reine, you are in love," cried Gerald. She met

his eyes with a steady gaze, though the color mounted to her cheeks.

"Is it with Frank?" he asked quickly.

"One could easily love Frank," she said; "but who could be jealous of him?"

"It is not the tea-man, what his is name?"

"Yes. It is the tea-man. His name is Smith." Her lips trembled with a nervous smile as she replaced her canvas against the wall. She was divided between womanly shame and artistic rapture. "It must be very good," she thought, "or it could not have betrayed me."

"Oh, Reine," cried Gerald in distress. "I have made a terrible mistake. How could you let me deceive myself? It is your fault."

"Do not say anything more," she said in an agitated tone.

"I must speak," he answered. "The truth cannot hurt us. How could you let me believe that we could always be devoted friends without the possibility of love? It was a wicked deception."

"I only followed your lead," she said in a trembling voice. "It was true. You have proved it. It is art alone that governs your heart. For it you are willing to sacrifice your life. You did not sacrifice me. Do not imagine it. I was hurt by the concealment and the deception; but now I see that it was all for the best. You will be great and famous. That will make you happy."

"I have sacrificed honor and happiness, and your esteem and confidence in me," he cried, "Massey's future too and my own self-respect. You could have saved me, Reine. You should have done it. Why has a woman a right to make a falsehood of her reserve? You cared more for your pride than for the happiness of both, and I, like a fool, believed that we were safely placed above the laws of ordinary humanity; that we could defy fate and laugh at love. It is the sort of arrogance that the gods punish."

"Who is spouting metaphorical nonsense?" asked Frank Bumstead entering the studio with a quick glance about him. "One of you two evidently. Where are the others?"

"The critics have made their speeches and departed," answered Reine.

"Her picture is fine, is it not?" said Frank, "but as for criticism do not look for it among the members of your own craft. Jealousy is more common in art than in love. Of course Hawley, who paints sea views, and Miss Burton, who does flowers, will praise Reine's heads with little reservation; while Bent and Holcombe, who also study the human form divine, will secretly damn what they openly commend."

"You are cynical," said Reine. "I think you feel the need of a cup of tea. Please ask my mother for some hot water."

Bumstead skipped across the floor, and returned from the kitchen with a tiny kettle of boiling water.

"How good it will be to have again one of our sociable symposiums, a midday one if you choose," he exclaimed. "It is the lack of them that has made me cynical. Gerald has a face as long as my arm. That also recalls old times. Do you remember, Reine, how he would fall into a chair with that despairing expression, turn his pockets inside out, and speak the words, 'Dead broke!' We understood that classical phrase, and gave him sympathy and tea."

Gerald's look darkened dangerously. "Fortune smiles on me now, and my pockets are no longer empty," he said. "It is not that I find musical composition any more lucrative than of yore, but I have married a wife who is kind enough to support me."

He turned and seated himself at the piano while Reine with a painful blush began to make the tea. The opening chords sounded tremulously beneath his fingers. A dirge-like movement gave place little by little to a tumultuous crowding of impassioned sounds, strange passages from grave to gay, now simple as the song of a bird that woos its mate, now freighted with superhuman pathos and despair. The improvisation grew into something he had not meant, a revelation of his own soul to itself. When he lifted his hands from the piano and turned about, Bumstead sat solemnly staring at him with an empty teacup held suspended, and Reine looked down to hide her tearful eyes.

"Well done," cried Bumstead. "What a pity you cannot write that out! It is better than your sonata."

"Wait till you hear Blavatsky play his sonata," said Reine, meaning to hide her emotion by an affectation of indifference.

"How could that be possible?" asked Frank.

"Blavatsky is the uncle of Gerald's wife," she explained in a faltering tone.

"Blavatsky shall never play my sonata," said Gerald.

"Do you understand, Reine? If he should beg for the privilege I should refuse. My motives henceforth must be above suspicion."

"Oh, Gerald," cried Reine reproachfully, though she could not repress a sense of pleasure that she had power to gain at a word the sacrifice of his ambition.

"Would you not do as much for me?" he asked.

"I will do as much," she answered, moved beyond prudence by his look and the impulse of her heart that responded to it. She rose and walked to her easel, flung back the cloth that covered her picture, and drew a sharp knife with a bold stroke across the wistfully smiling face upon the canvas.

Bumstead rushed to her side. "Are you mad, Reine?" he cried, seizing her arm. Mrs. Chapman who had observed the scene from the doorway entered weeping hysterically, and uttering incoherent protests. Reine looked at Gerald divided between triumph and shame.

"I have wished that I dared to do it ever since I came home," she said. "A girl has no right to show her love so frankly in her face. Such a subject should

not be placed on view at a public exhibition. Frank is right. There is a meaning in art which we should hold sacred."

"I am sorry if you did it on my account," said Bumstead regretfully.

"No, it was for Gerald's sake," answered Reine. "But he must not treat his sonata so cruelly for mine. That would be useless folly."

"You must be crazy, Reine," wailed her mother. "I wish Gerald would not put such extravagant notions into your head. This picture was to have made your fortune."

"I can never show you what I feel, Reine," said Gerald in her ear. "I understand you better than you do yourself. After this we belong to each other."

He hastened from the room, and Frank rose with a sigh. "A dismal spell is upon us," he said. "This has not been at all like our jolly symposiums of the past. Is it that we are growing old? Even the tea is not what it used to be."

## CHAPTER XI.

MRS. VANCE was sitting with Massey when Gerald's telegram arrived. Massey read the message with anxiety which was replaced by joyous excitement.

"Blavatsky is here, as you know," she said, "and Gerald wants me to see him at once. I promised that I would persuade my uncle to play Gerald's new sonata at one of his recitals. It will require all my diplomacy to bring it about, but for Gerald's sake I am willing to try."

"Why does he telegraph?" asked Mrs. Vance.

"He cannot come home to lunch," answered Massey, "and he is anxious, as I am, to lose no time. When your carriage comes for you I will go with you and call on my uncle at his hotel."

"You cannot go alone," said her aunt. "I must accompany you, I suppose, though I do not in the least approve of it. To make advances on the score of relationship after all that has passed may only subject you to mortification and annoyance."

"I must do it for Gerald's sake," said Massey. Mrs. Vance sighed with an inward protest against the influence which too often opposed her own; but she accompanied Massey to the carriage, and gave the order to



drive to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, with heroic relinquishment of a Ladies'-Club meeting at which she had promised to be present.

Blavatsky was in, it appeared, but no one was allowed to disturb the hours of repose which preceded his recital.

"Pray tell him that his niece desires to see him," said Mrs. Vance, and the clerk consented to send the cards with this message ; but the reply was made that Blavatsky was at home to no one.

"It is just as I foresaw," exclaimed Mrs. Vance, in annoyance. "He has no wish to make our acquaintance."

Massey's look expressed such sorrowful dejection that Rudolph Blackman, who was passing through the hall, paused as he recognized the ladies, and inquired with eager civility if there were any way in which he could be of use.

Massey was glad to interest his sympathy in the cause of her husband's ambition, and, although Mrs. Vance opposed any further attempt to reach the great man's notice, Rudolph's enthusiasm recognized no difficulties and foresaw no disappointment.

"I have the honor of Blavatsky's acquaintance," he said. "I have gained a certain reputation as a musical critic—Heaven knows how—and he is kind enough to remember me when we meet. I can persuade him to see you, and I can give Gerald's work the advantage of my recommendation."

"How kind you are!" cried Massey. "But you have never heard this sonata."

"I can take it on trust. I know what Gerald has done, and what his inspiration must be now that his Muse is embodied and dwells with him," he answered.

Massey blushed. "I am no inspiration, I assure you," she said. "When he composes, he wishes me a hundred miles away."

Rudolph gave her a keen glance which seemed to note and dwell upon a shade of discontent in this speech.

"Artists are so selfish," said Mrs. Vance, as if in comment or explanation.

Rudolph laughed. "I agree with you," he said. "It is much safer to be a dilettante in art. Then one may sit on the benches and criticise the gladiators struggling down below in the dusty arena. When we are interested in the fate of a particular one, however, we must do what we can to help him, and hold our thumbs up at the proper moment. Wait for me, ladies, and give me your prayers while I go to encounter the lion."

He hastened away, and Massey sat looking after him with a smile. "How charming he is!" she said.

"People always seem charming who help us to do what we are set upon doing," remarked Mrs. Vance, sententiously.

Rudolph returned radiant with success.

"I have found the open sesame to Blavatsky's door as you will to his heart," he said; and Massey could

not restrain the light that leaped to her eyes and the warmth of gratitude that added melody to her voice as she thanked him. "He asks me to bring you to him at once," added Rudolph, leading the way.

"I shall always regard you as a friendly magician," said Massey. "Your power seems to be as unlimited as your kindness. There is nothing you wish for, that you cannot possess."

"Alas, there is the roc's egg!" he said.

Massey smiled. She wondered that he remembered her chance remark.

"After Lent I mean to give a ball," continued Rudolph. "It is to be very select. Mrs. Houghton has promised to matronize it for me. Will you come to it? May I give it for you?"

"First make sure of Gerald's promise to attend," replied Massey. "I love to dance, and can never refuse an opportunity, but when he finds it a bore, I am ready enough to give up my pleasure in it, rather than to drag him about against his will."

"Oh, he will come to my ball, of course," said Rudolph. "He will make an exception in favor of *Auld Lang Syne*."

Blavatsky received his guests with courtesy tinged with embarrassment.

"So you are Katrina's daughter," he said to Massey, holding her hand, and gazing long at her face. "You have her eyes. Poor Katrina!"

He strode up and down the room, pausing as he

passed the sofa where the ladies were seated, to utter some rapid sentences, and then resume his walk.

"I am glad you came to see me. If Katrina should come back to us, I should be glad to see her ; but we cannot undo the past. When we are young, we are foolish and hot-tempered. Our own opinion seems worth more than anything in the world. We are sure we can never make a mistake. We are as gods. I hated your father because he was an American, and now the Americans are my best friends, and kindest listeners. They give me their dollars, and, better than that, they give me their hearts. You are married, I hear, and your husband writes music. What sort of music is it that he writes?"

"He has an original style," answered Massey. "He is not an imitator. He has lately written a sonata which is quite as good as Beethoven, I am sure."

"That is better than I can do," said Blavatsky. "Where is this paragon? I should like to make his acquaintance."

"Oh, you must know him. You are so kind," said Massey. "To-day, unfortunately, he could not come. He would not dare to ask so much, but I am going to entreat you, for his sake and mine, to play the sonata I speak of at one of your recitals. It would make us so happy."

Blavatsky stroked his moustache. "Shall I put him

in the place of Liszt for the last number on my Friday's programme?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," cried Massey, springing to his side and claspng his arm entreatingly.

"Would the public be content with the substitution?" he asked, looking at Rudolph.

"The public adores novelty," said Rudolph. "You would be doing the greatest kindness to my friend. It would be his stepping-stone to fortune."

"Why should I make another man's fortune? I have worked hard for my own," said Blavatsky. "But bring me his notes if he is not brave enough to come himself. I will see what I can do with them."

Massey flung her arms impetuously about his neck and kissed him. "You are an angel," she exclaimed.

"There, there, that will do," he said, releasing himself. "Katrina used to kiss me and rumple my neck-tie. My wife did the same; but since they are gone no one else is allowed the liberty. Come again before Friday, and I will try the composition of this second Beethoven."

Rudolph escorted the ladies to their carriage, and Massey, radiant with happiness, gave him her hand for farewell. He held it detainingly as he said, "Remember that my ball is to be given in your honor, and that you are to dance the first set with me."

"It is too far in the future for a promise," she said, smiling at him through the door which he held ajar.

"Heaven is far in the future, yet you hope for its

happiness," he answered, closing the door and lifting his hat as the carriage drove off.

Massey turned with heightened color to her aunt, who exclaimed, "My dear child, you should have given a decided refusal. Mr. Blackman is not the man whom I should choose for your acquaintance. I am surprised that Gerald should have introduced him to you. He has been the hero of several scandals and divorce suits that are not yet forgotten. He presumes upon his wealth and the social position of his mother's family to maintain a place in society from which he might very properly be excluded. In future your best plan will be to avoid him studiously."

"I will if that is true," said Massey, "but I can hardly believe it. Gerald is so fond of him."

"My information is perfectly correct," replied her aunt. "Gerald's judgment of character is singularly unbiased by moral considerations."

Massey exclaimed protestingly.

"My dear, you must realize that Gerald chooses his friends for what they bring to him, disregarding their standing in society. If they amuse him and can teach him something new, he does not stop to consider whether they are fit acquaintances for his wife."

"I should not expect him to," said Massey. "Very often my friends do not prove congenial to him."

Mrs. Vance smiled and held her niece's hand for a moment, pressing it kindly. "You are loyal to your husband and that is right," she said. "I am a little

jealous, perhaps, as parents always are of those who take their children from them."

"I am still yours," said Massey, bending towards her and kissing her. "Of course he must always be first. That is only right."

Mrs. Vance assented with a smile, but when she was alone in the carriage, having left her niece at the door, she leaned back upon the cushions with a long-drawn sigh.

"Why am I so severe and ungenerous?" she thought. "Why do I long each time to carry Massey home with me and bar the door against her husband? As long as he makes her happy I should not criticise him for his failure to reach the standard of my requirements."

With a wish to atone for her confessed injustice, Mrs. Vance stopped at the florist's and ordered for Gerald a large bunch of Jacqueminot roses of which she knew him to be extravagantly fond, and for Massey she bought a tiny bunch of English violets.

"She will understand," thought Mrs. Vance smiling, while her eyes grew moist. "It is the way she would divide, if she could, the goods of earth and the blessings of heaven, all for him, nothing for herself."

When Massey entered her parlor she found Mrs. Grayling and Miss Linton awaiting her.

"We waited because the maid promised that you would soon return," explained Mrs. Grayling.

"I am delighted to see you," declared Massey.

"How well you are looking," said Mrs. Linton.

"Oh, I am so happy," said Massey.

"And it is ten weeks past the honeymoon," exclaimed Mrs. Grayling. "Well, I give you three months more of perfect felicity. After that it is a sort of chromatic scale going down, down, down half a note at a time."

"Oh, Belle, how dare you? What a dismal prophecy," cried Miss Linton.

"I do not prophesy for you," retorted her friend. "You are to marry the best creature in the world, a man with only three affections, yourself, his flute, and his newspaper. It is these young men with a thousand distractions who are not to be trusted. Where is our dear Gerald, Massey? Are we not to have the pleasure of seeing him?"

"If you will stay to dinner, as I hope I can persuade you," said Massey. "I have a delightful piece of news for him. That is what has made me so particularly happy to-day. My uncle Blavatsky has promised to play a sonata of Gerald's at his Friday's recital. It is a profound secret, of course. I will trust you not to mention it."

She related the circumstances of her visit to Blavatsky and its fortunate result, explaining its effect upon her husband's future prospects. The ladies sympathized warmly.

"My little affairs seem unimportant after this," said Miss Linton after a pause, "but I must correct an im-



pression which Belle persists in creating. I am no longer engaged to Mr. Berkeley."

Massey stared aghast, uncertain what form of reply would be welcome, while Mrs. Grayling rose from her chair with a movement of vexation.

"Alice!" she exclaimed. "Why will you persist in telling this out to every one? That will make a reconciliation, when you wish it, impossible."

Miss Linton smiled serenely.

"Oh, Massey," continued Mrs. Grayling, "I have been laughing and talking to hide an aching heart. Alice has jilted my cousin, and gone to live in the slums and work for the poor. Did you ever hear of anything so wild? and it all came through my idiotic folly in taking her to an East Side Chapel to hear an old lover of hers preach. He preaches well, I grant, better than my own Mr. Baker; but why should Alice wreck her life and Cousin John's and break my heart for the sake of pleasing this man. I call it flying in the face of providence. It looks as if she were making him her first object in life."

Miss Linton blushed deeply. "He will never misunderstand me," she said. "As for other people's judgments I must submit to them. My conscience is at rest. I wish Mr. Berkeley well with all my heart. I did him a wrong to promise to marry him when I could not love him."

"It is wretched taste to force all this upon Mrs. Maynard," said Mrs. Grayling.

"I wished to undo the effect of your words, that is all," responded Miss Linton, "and it was partly the object of my call to tell Massey something of my plans."

"Oh, I shall be so glad to hear more of them," said Massey.

"Some other time," answered Miss Linton.

"Yes, we must go," said Mrs. Grayling. "Some time when I am not here she may tell you of her crazy purpose of cultivating and educating the dwellers in the slums. I have no patience to listen to such nonsense."

"I am sorry that Gerald misses the pleasure of seeing you, and that you will not stay to meet him," said Massey. "He should be here by this time; but he has warned me that I must never count on his punctuality."

"Oh, he is an odd creature," said Mrs. Grayling laughing. "No one can count on him for anything except for the unexpected which is sure to happen. I remember one day at Suffolk he came to a tea I gave in my cottage, and instead of making himself agreeable to the pretty girls as I meant that he should, he sat in a corner with Alice, who was pouring tea, and turned his back upon her while he wrote music in his portfolio. Not a word could any one get out of him. Well, give him my love, Massey. He knows only too well that there is a soft place in my heart for him."

With a sigh of mock sentiment the widow went her

way, and Miss Linton followed, after receiving from Massey a tender kiss of sympathy.

The dinner-hour was long past, and Massey sat down to a lonely meal at which care was her companion. Gerald had never before delayed so long without excuse or explanation. The hands of the French clock dragged on till midnight, and Massey sat in Gerald's easy chair opposite the hearth, watching the flickering wood fire and listening for his footstep.

Did a woman ever live without the experience of what it is to watch and wait in solitude counting the throb of anxious heart-beats from hour to hour? Massey feared a thousand imaginary evils which her excited fancy traced to their consequences with harrowing vividness of detail. When at last she heard the sound of Gerald's latch-key in the door she rushed to meet him with delight proportionate to her relief. He looked pale and haggard, and he returned her embrace by giving a kiss lightly, indifferently she thought.

"Oh, Gerald, I have triumphed," she exclaimed. "I have seen Blavatsky, and he has promised to play your sonata at his Friday recital."

Gerald sank into a chair and shaded his eyes with his hand. Massey took his silence for excess of joy.

"It is almost too good to be true," she continued. "I will carry him the notes to-morrow. Will Beckwith print a copy, or shall he play from your manuscript? It is delightfully clear."

"I stopped at Beckwith's for the manuscript on my

way home," he said, drawing a roll of paper from his pocket.

"Then I will take that to my uncle," said Massey.

"Tell me how delighted you are at my success."

"It was very good and clever of you," he replied absently, stooping over the hearth, and raking the embers into a blaze.

"Are you ill, darling?" asked Massey alarmed at his tone of indifference. He shook his head, and laid a roll of manuscript carefully in the midst of the leaping flames.

"Is it your sonata?" cried Massey. "Are you crazy?" She bent to snatch it from the fire, but Gerald took her arm and held it detainingly with his eyes fixed on the smouldering sheets that unrolled and curled as if stirred by ghostly fingers, showing the notes in black upon a surface of bronze until the ashy substance fell apart into nothingness.

Massey stared at him with wild questioning eyes. "Have they already done the printing?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"It will never be printed. This is the end of it," he answered. "Blavatsky will never play it. It was the devil's bargain from the first, my soul for the value of his influence; and it ends as such bargains do in ashes and disappointment."

Massey was too sorely stricken at heart to weep or to exclaim. Her fear for his health and reason overpowered her disappointment.

"What has happened, dear?" she asked piteously. "Are you ill?"

Gerald looked at her white face with sudden compunction. "I have made you suffer," he said.

"Oh, cruelly," she cried, "but you terrify me more. Are you beside yourself? Do you know what you have done?"

"I am well and in my right mind," he answered with a faint smile. "My consciousness has never been clearer. It was necessary to sacrifice my sonata in order to save my self-respect. You would not have me grudge it for that."

"You look so strange. You are not yourself," she urged anxiously, laying her hand upon his forehead.

He shrank from the touch. "I am tired, that is all," he said. "Do not fret about me. It is too late now for a discussion of the subject. To-morrow we will come to a clearer understanding, if you choose."

Massey wiped her eyes and suppressed a sob. Gerald paced up and down the room with his hands behind him, pausing to bury his face in a basket of roses, with an instinctive recognition of their beauty.

"Aunt Julia sent you those roses," said Massey with an effort at cheerfulness. "Are they not lovely?"

Gerald looked more attentively at the blushing Jacqueminots which Massey had placed on his writing desk above which hung a water-color portrait of Reine Chapman.

"Her flowers, and you put them there!" he murmured under his breath.

Massey gave a low cry of sudden pain. She stood for a moment transfixed with a suspicion which she dared not utter, and then sank upon a couch in an agony of tears. Gerald stood helplessly beside her.

"What have I done? What have I said? Dear Massey, do not cry. Your nerves are unstrung by sitting up so late here alone. Forgive me if I have hurt you."

"You have killed me," said Massey with tragic emphasis, burying her face in the cushions.

"What do you mean?" he asked coldly. "I cannot understand exaggeration."

She sat up, her fair face distorted with grief. "You love her," she exclaimed, pointing to the picture's smiling face. "It is for her sake, in some way, that you have burned your sonata."

"This is what I have feared," he answered wearily. "Life becomes absolutely impossible in an atmosphere of jealous suspicion."

"You do not deny it?" she cried.

"I refuse to discuss the subject," he answered.

## CHAPTER XII.

At breakfast next morning, Massey, pale and heavy-eyed, poured Gerald's coffee and responded with forced cheerfulness to his perfunctory remarks about the weather and the news of the day as conveyed by the morning paper. When the maid had left them alone she went and stood by his chair and leaned upon his shoulder.

"Forgive me for my unkindness last night," she said.

He lifted his head with a smile. "Thank you for saying that. We have never quarrelled before, and it hurts."

"We shall never quarrel again," she answered with emotion.

"No, never," he replied. "I am sure of that." He held her hand with a lingering pressure.

"Jealousy is a sin," said Massey. "I shall do penance for it, and struggle against it."

"It is something that I cannot understand," he said. "It seems such an unreasonable thing." Massey wished to reply, but prudence kept her silent. "I am so glad to leave you in better spirits," he added. "I

shall lunch down town, and if I am late to dinner do not wait for me."

The lightning flashed in Massey's eyes, but she restrained her emotion. "What are you going to do to-day?" she asked.

"I have important business on hand," he answered. "Do not worry if I am late. It is barely possible that I may be out of town over night."

"Then I shall be distracted with anxiety again," she said. "Take me with you if you must go."

"I cannot do that," he replied. "Go to your aunt's if I am late. Promise me that you will."

Massey's determination to preserve unbroken the serenity of their reconciliation struggled with a new temptation to mistrust his purpose; but she smiled bravely as he said farewell; and when he returned upon some pretext and kissed her a second time with unusual tenderness, she did not show the tears she longed to shed. When he was gone she stood in despair for a moment fighting with the jealous anger which was like poignant physical pain. A dull dread weighed upon her. The shadow of some terrible event was projected in advance upon her fancy; but with an effort she repulsed the dark suggestion, taking refuge in a determination which had come like an inspiration with her first waking thought.

She recalled the fact that she had preserved the first draught of her husband's sonata as he had written it carelessly on sheets of paper torn from his note-book,



and that one day she had sorted and arranged these scattered pages rescued from the waste-basket in the hope that the future fame of their composer would give them value. The work of reconstruction would be difficult, but the importance of the task gave her patience for the drudgery which it involved.

The consecration of her labor to the fulfillment of Gerald's relinquished ambition seemed to expiate the injustice of her still active suspicion.

With some interruptions, her task occupied her during the day ; and it was late in the evening when, having copied the last note, she seated herself at the piano and played the reconstructed work slowly and tentatively with a growing satisfaction in its complete correctness. Each swelling chord, she thought, must echo in her husband's heart, uniting his soul to hers to rejoice over the resurrection of the hopes that had seemed to perish in ashes.

At the same hour of the evening when Massey played his sonata, Gerald presented himself at Rudolph Blackman's. He was looking white and ill.

"I want to sit awhile with you, Rudolph, and think," he said sinking into a chair.

"Stay as long as you like," replied Rudolph ; "but you will hardly find this a place for quiet meditation. Forty or fifty men and women are to be my guests to-night in masks and dominoes. I am glad you happened in. I will lend you a costume, and the scene

may amuse you. We are to conclude in the small hours by a *danse macabre*."

"A dance of death?" asked Gerald in bewilderment.

"Yes, it is something new, in this city at least, and I flatter myself that it will be a success," answered Rudolph. "I have discovered that when life begins to pall upon one, the best way to renew its zest, and to awaken a riotous pleasure in mere existence, is to contrast it closely with the ghastliest facts of death. The skeleton at the Egyptian feast was the design of a sated voluptuary, not that of a stern moralist, as people would have us believe."

"I am faint," said Gerald. "I believe I am hungry. I cannot wait for your funeral feast, if I may have a cracker now."

"I insist that you shall stay," said Rudolph. "An affair like this is a unique experience. But I will fortify your inner man meantime. Your nerves should be in good condition."

He summoned his butler, who brought a plate of sandwiches and a glass of sherry.

"I believe that I forgot to take any lunch or dinner," said Gerald as he ate and drank.

"Your charming wife should remind you," responded his host; but he was too much concerned with his coming festivities to give Gerald his undivided attention, and he left him to oversee the decorations in the dining-room.

Gerald found solitude welcome, and retreating from observation he flung himself upon a lounge of violet velvet in a small room adjoining the library which Rudolph had furnished in a spirit of temporary enthusiasm for the genius of Poe. A stuffed raven and a marble bust, cushions and carpets, suggested the famous poem ; but Rudolph had shut off this nook by heavy curtains, and he referred to it apologetically to any one who chanced to penetrate within as a relic of the bad taste and the folly of his salad days. Gerald found rest refreshing. The day had been spent in an aimless pacing of pavements which wearied the body, and a constantly recurring struggle of doubt with resolution which had fatigued the mind.

He was content for an hour or so to forget the haunting purpose which had dogged his footsteps, a silent shadow which he meant to ignore until the moment came when he must turn and face it. He lay with half-shut eyes, listening to the roll of carriages which announced the arrival of guests. Light foot-falls, peals of laughter, and the distant scraping of violins gave token that the ball was under way. Suddenly his host parted the curtains and looked in upon him.

"You are losing the fun," he said cheerfully. "Here is a mask and domino for you. Put them on and come into the drawing-room."

Gerald assumed the light costume of black and white in an indifferent mood, giving no attention to its design,

and leaving his corner he strolled through the rooms. In spite of Rudolph's warning he was not prepared for the strange spectacle that met his view, and he started in alarm at the first domino he encountered. The mask represented a grinning skull with hollow eye-sockets, and a jaw that moved when the wearer spoke or laughed. To see fifty such figures dressed in sable robes, sitting, standing, or promenading arm in arm, laughing and chattering with fearfully-moving yellow jaw-bones, and eyes glaring from hollow sockets, was trying to a melancholy mood and high-strung, sensitive nerves.

But with the assembled guests the affair had the intoxicating effect which Rudolph had predicted. Rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes had never been so conscious of their power as when hidden behind these repulsive masks. Youthful limbs and manly muscles felt inspired beneath the black grave-clothes with unusual elasticity of motion. The orchestra played a funeral dirge, and the procession made the round of the apartments until the dining-hall was reached, where it came to a pause amid awe-struck exclamations of surprise.

A great table ran the length of the apartment covered with black velvet edged with heavy silver fringe. At each corner tall black plumes were erected after the manner of a hearse's decorations. The light was supplied by huge silver bowls full of blazing alcohol and salt, which threw a ghastly, wavering illumination over the scene, making it as unreal as the hallucina-

tions of a hideous nightmare. The masks were retained during the meal, the movable jaws allowing freedom of motion in eating and drinking, and it was curious to note the incongruous effect of a delicate champagne glass full of beaded wine, held by a gloved hand painted to represent the bony articulations of a skeleton, and applied to a grinning death's head with evident relish.

Rudolph sat at the head of the table in a costume similar to that of his guests, and his high carved chair was decorated with ghastly emblems and surmounted by a genuine skull.

The spectacle was so impressive that at first conversation languished, but as the feast progressed the cheering wine loosened the tongues of the guests and changed their mood to a reckless jollity which soon became wild and noisy revelry. At the close the host sprang from his seat and led a partner into the ball-room followed by the laughing troop of maskers two by two.

Musicians, concealed behind black screens, struck up a fast and furious dance measure, and the *danse macabre* began—a procession of ghostly shapes whirling in intricate figures, pirouetting and prancing in wild abandon, holding hands, and dancing in a ring like the witches on the Brocken, till, at a signal, masks and dominoes were removed, and, with a burst of gaiety, beauty and youth, strength and manly vigor, emerged from temporary eclipse, and celebrated the triumph by shouts of mutual congratulation.

To a spectator the sight was impressive. The flushed and dishevelled dancers, who concluded the ball with a commonplace cotillon, and then rolled homeward in their carriages nodding from the effects of fatigue and wine, could not realize the full consequence of the scene. When they woke with a headache next day, it was to describe with a yawn another of Rudolph Blackman's absurdly original entertainments.

Gerald had been unnoticed among the crowd, shrouded from observation in his mask and domino, which he had discovered with a start to be of the same ghoulish design as those about him. He had listened to the merry and meaningless chatter, watched the wild dance from a distance, and flung off his unwelcome disguise with an air of relief at the appointed signal. He had waited till the last guest had departed, and then he rejoined the master of the house in his small private study.

Rudolph stood moodily in front of a dying fire that crumbled on the hearth, stirred by the wind that rose in the early morning and howled in the chimney. He turned with an angry start as Gerald entered.

"You still here?" he asked, with pointed emphasis.

"I have outstayed my welcome," said Gerald nervously, "but I must speak to you, Rudolph. I have waited till I could find you alone."

"Come some other day," said Rudolph yawning. "It is dangerous to test the devotion of a lover in the

dreary hours succeeding a ball. My friendship will not bear the strain, I warn you."

"There is no other day," said Gerald.

"What do you mean?" asked Rudolph, quickly.

Gerald turned away to avoid his questioning look. "May I examine the things in your cabinet once more?" he asked, pointing to a carved teak-wood cabinet with shelves and drawers, that stood in a corner.

"Bah, they would seem nauseating after such a dose of death's emblems as I have given you this evening," replied his friend. "Go to sleep on a lounge in the library yonder, with Cupid and Psyche before your eyes, and the Venus of Milo at your head."

Gerald shook his head. "I came this evening to ask you to lend me the key of your cabinet," he said, "and it seemed a very curious coincidence that I should encounter your *danse macabre*."

His lips trembled, and his fingers worked nervously.

"Take a dose of chloral, and go to sleep," said Rudolph. "My valet shall make you up a bed."

"Do you advise that way?" began Gerald.

"To awake refreshed in the morning, of course," added Rudolph, quickly. "What the deuce are you after, Gerald? Help yourself, but do not bore me. I am *souffrant, accablé, à bout de force*."

He took a key from a ring, tossed it to Gerald, and flung himself upon a lounge at the further end of the room. Gerald opened the cabinet with trembling hands. It held a collection of pistols, daggers, and

curiously shaped stilettos and poignards. On the shelves were ranged numerous bottles holding liquids and powders. Rudolph had once explained to Gerald that he had made a collection of the various agents for speedy and convenient self-destruction. In case a sudden whim should bring the wish to end his days, it would be well to have a choice at hand, and not be compelled to resort to the stupid and inelegant expedients which people make use of in moments of desperation.

Rudolph watched Gerald through half-closed eyes. He saw him take down a bottle and empty part of the powder it contained upon a sheet of paper, which he folded, and placed carefully in his breast pocket.

"I wish to remark, Gerald," said Rudolph, in an indifferent tone, "that when I filled that cabinet, I arranged expressly that it should be placed in my own private sanctum. For the worst form, and the most inexcusable crime of which I can conceive, would be to swallow a powder, or use a pistol in such a way as to make a mess in the house of a friend." He stretched himself, shut his eyes, and yawned vigorously.

"I understand. I agree with you. Good-bye," said Gerald, with grave dignity.

When he had gone, Rudolph sprang from the lounge, went to his telephone, and called up the chief of the detective police.

"A friend of mine has just left my house, suffering from temporary suicidal mania caused by indigestion,



and a fit of blue devils," he said. "Be so kind as to watch him from a respectful distance for a day or two."

He gave a description of his friend, and answered a series of particular questions with brevity and clearness; then he went to bed and to sleep, murmuring, "It is the only way. Open opposition is useless with a madman. I hope for the sake of his beautiful wife, that he will not succeed. It would break her heart to lose her paragon, the rival of Beethoven."

He sighed and smiled as he extinguished the light, fancying for a moment that out of the darkness, Massey's eyes questioned him anxiously.

## CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Gerald left Rudolph's door the winter morning had still the blackness of midnight. A biting wind sent clouds of dust before it. The streets were bare and icy. The electric lights flickered as their globes swung to and fro, making a waving path of shadows across the pavement. Gerald wondered if Rudolph, in his search for sensations, had ever known the bitterness of a friend's desertion in an hour of mortal need.

The theories of life which Rudolph held required a stoical indifference to pain. He professed to have no fear of death, which was merely the cessation of thought and feeling. He spoke of suicide as a convenient means of ending time when it should grow tedious. Gerald had often listened without dissent to these doctrines, and he knew that he was inconsistent in objecting to their ultimate conclusions.

He wandered down to the piers along the riverside. Perhaps it would make less trouble for his friends if his body should be given to the ebbing water to carry to the sea ; but something in his sensitive artistic nature shrank from this end. He passed a three-story building of dingy brick which he remembered as a cheap boarding-house kept by a respectable widow who had

rented him a room in one of his seasons of desperate financial necessity. Mrs. Jones had been kind to him. He had reminded her of an absent son, doubtless a great vagabond, from her description of him, and she had lavished many motherly attentions upon him, besides showing a noble indifference to the occasional failure of his weekly payment. It would be a poor return for her kindness to "make a mess" in her house; but there seemed to be a certain fitness in beginning the long sleep upon the cot in the attic room, where hunger had sometimes wakened him from dreams of glory and riches.

He entered the house, and climbed the stairs, which seemed steeper and darker than in his memory of them. A gas jet burned in the upper hall. The lodgers in the house were of a class who came and went at unseasonable hours. A bright light shone through a half-open door, and hurrying steps sounded within. Gerald stood undecided, when a woman, peeping out at him, whispered hoarsely, "Go along, and keep quiet. The minister's come. He's dying fast."

Gerald approached her, and she started, noticing that he was a stranger. He told his need of a lodging, but she cut him short. "He's dying, I tell you. We can't have nobody here now."

"I must see Mrs. Jones. She knows me," urged Gerald.

Mrs. Jones heard her name, and came into the hall, shaken with sobs. "Don't turn him out," she

said. "He's a young man like Tom. Perhaps that's the way he got his death, being driven from door to door. Give him the back room. There's the key."

"It's her son," explained the other; "he come back home to die. He said home was good for that anyhow. It's awful to hear him curse and swear; but the minister's here now talking to him."

Gerald entered the back room, which was dark and empty. A dilapidated bed, a bureau, and a chair were revealed by the light of a tallow candle which his conductor left with him. There was no fire, and the wind entered the loose window frames and cracked panes. Heat could be supplied from the front room when the communicating door was left open between. Now, although closed, it did not keep out the sound of the minister's voice, the mother's sobs, and the groans of the dying man. Gerald sat upon the edge of the bed with his head upon his hands, and listened awestruck. It was strange that after the counterfeit show of Rudolph's ghastly dance he should here encounter the reality, far too impressive, even in these poor surroundings, for a jest.

It was strange that a man of his own age should lie there dying. He was conscious of the wish that he might set out on the long journey at the same time with the other. He felt a yearning need of fellowship, let the company be what it might. He decided to wait till the sobs and voices in the next room announced that the last moment for the object of that love and

solicitude had come, and then, alone and unnoticed, to swallow the powder that would cause a sudden endless sleep. He did not attempt to reconcile the conflicting ideas of sleep and conscious companionship. He felt dull and indifferent. He had no thought for Massey or for Reine. He hoped that Rudolph would feel a pang of remorse when he heard the news. He wished that the man in the next room would not struggle and groan so long. He found the waiting tedious.

"He's conscious now, I believe, Mr. Grant," he heard the widow say. "His eyes have a look as if they knew me. Oh, talk to him about his salvation. Perhaps it's not too late for him to repent."

Gerald had often curled a contemptuous lip when he had heard such words in sermons, or met them in so-called religious books; but at this moment he could not greet them with a pitying smile. He found himself sympathizing like a spectator at a tragedy when the acting is fine. The ring of genuine feeling must awaken a response. He hoped that Mr. Grant would speak; that the man would repent; that the mother would have her wish.

Mr. Grant spoke and Gerald listened. He told an old story which seemed new, for Gerald heard it from a standpoint where prejudice fails, and things that have seemed important sink into insignificance. As he listened to words addressed to another, the ideas of the speaker came to him with the force of an impersonal truth conveyed without the intervention of a

bodily medium. Mr. Grant spoke of sin and its villainess ; of righteousness and its beauty ; of the need of a Saviour to uplift and purify, cleansing foul stains through His redeeming blood, making life a possibility, and heaven a certainty. Phrases that Gerald had once stigmatized as cant took on a convincing force. He was shaken by an overpowering emotion.

The man died, having made no sign. The mother's wailing filled the dreary house. The minister uttered some words of friendly sympathy and left her, promising to return.

Gerald rose from his seat upon the bed. His limbs were cramped and stiff. He shivered and buttoned his coat tightly about him, becoming conscious for the first time that the room was icy cold. He followed Mr. Grant down the stairs and into the street. The dawn was broad and rosy in the east. Gerald shook a powder from a folded paper into the gutter, and overtook the young minister with a rapid stride.

"May I speak to you, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Grant turned with a quick glance of inquiry, slackening his speed, and nodding with friendly dignity.

"I want to ask you a question," said Gerald. "Is a sudden, emotional acceptance of Christianity worth anything when a man is broken down by a long nervous strain? Should it be allowed to counterbalance a life-long denial of it by the same man in the full vigor of health and mental power?"

"What have you done to test your faith?" asked

the minister, "for I suppose it is of yourself that you are speaking. A man who has had a cataract removed is eager to try his power of vision ; when a bone knits he wishes to attempt its recovered use. If your emotion represents a reality, if your eyes have really been opened to the truth, you will learn to know that it is so."

"I have only had this faith for a few minutes," said Gerald smiling, "but you might say that I have put it to a practical test by giving up for its sake a settled purpose of taking my own life. Perhaps it was only a disguise for cowardice at the last moment. Who can tell? I fancied that I was absolutely free from fear. I felt a curiosity to know what was to come, and was impatient for the moment that I had decided upon. Suddenly all was changed. It was not that I did not long to carry out my purpose ; but in my inmost soul I felt that I had not the right to end my life of my own choice. For the first time I recognized a power outside and above my own individual will, a personal power acting upon my will. You will tell me that I was converted, I suppose. A friend who jests at religion would assure me that the instinctive physical shrinking from self-destruction had projected itself objectively upon my consciousness with the result of creating an independent illusion. We explain things according to our mental bias. Who can tell where the truth lies?"

"It is not every one who can receive the truth,"

said Mr. Grant. "He that hath ears to hear alone will hear. It you sincerely wish to know the doctrine you will learn it, as the Master points the way, by doing His works. Humility is the very foundation-stone of Christianity. You can begin from your present standpoint with a hope of success, for your first act has been the submission of your will. The philosophers who stand on the platforms of their temples of science, weighing the stars and searching out the infinite, cannot attain to this knowledge, unless from another source they have learned what it is to preserve the meek heart and perfect trust of a little child."

"How can I be sure that the doctrines which you sincerely believe are true?" asked Gerald. "All deductions from a fallacy must partake of its falsehood. How can you dare to speak with absolute certainty of that which cannot be proved?"

"Do you demand the proof of Christianity?" asked Mr. Grant. "I thought you were inquiring for its meaning concerning yourself. I have no time to argue for my faith. I will not even stop to question why you demand no proof from science for its belief in the uniformity of nature, a fixed belief which cannot be proved. Christ heals the broken heart, but He does not address His consolations to the critical intellect disturbed by its own uneasy speculations. If you have ears to hear you will listen to the Master when He bids you learn his meekness and lowliness of heart. It is



the pride of the eyes and the pride of life that make faith impossible."

"What would you advise me to do?" asked Gerald.

"Come home with me and let us talk it over," answered Mr. Grant. "You can tell me something of your circumstances. I shall be greatly interested to assist you if I can."

Gerald was glad to have an object and a destination. He walked beside the vigorous young man who strode along with the gait of an athlete. The minister's convictions were evidently not the result of an abnormal nervous organization.

Mr. Grant lived in a tall, dingy house, of which he rented the first floor. He introduced Gerald into a library filled with books, which were the only luxuries it contained, with the exception of one commodious chair, which he invited his guest to occupy.

"You must be a great reader," remarked Gerald, glancing about.

Mr. Grant surveyed his crowded book-shelves with the look of tender appreciation which the true book-lover bestows upon his darlings in vellum and morocco, or in plain cloth and tattered leather,—the dress does not matter if the heart is right.

"They are my delight and my temptation," he said. "I should like to sit in a cloister cell and read all day. I should like to spend my last cent for the latest work in science or theology. I often draw the curtains

across my shelves and turn my back upon them, not daring to trust my discretion."

The subject of books proved one of common interest, and led the conversation into by-paths remote from the subject which each had at heart. Mr. Grant was awaiting a confession which his guest was disinclined to make.

"You will be my guest at breakfast," said the minister, as he lighted a spirit lamp, and began to make some coffee. "It need not interrupt our conversation."

Gerald watched his preparations with the languor which results as a reaction from severe mental strain. He felt that the man whose word had changed his destiny was in future responsible for the use he made of ~~it~~. It was no more than fitting that he should give him a place at his fireside, and minister to his bodily wants, while the uneasy spiritual craving that he had awakened demanded succor which was perhaps beyond his power to bestow.

Mr. Grant set a table for two with coffee, boiled eggs, and fresh bread and butter, and he began to eat his breakfast with the appetite of a strong man not too well nourished. Gerald sipped his coffee in a perfunctory way, while he continued the conversation.

"Music is my only serious passion," he said. "In literature I have a broad latitude of appreciation and no fixed ideals. I like Whitman, and Swinburne, and Lanier. I like Emerson and Ruskin, and James

and Meredith. I like the author of the Proverbs. What clever things he says! In everything but music I have the habit of *dilenteism*. I am afraid that my Christianity would be of that sort."

Mr. Grant looked serious. "It is a detestable habit of mind," he said. "It is the curse of our day."

"Forgive the interruption, and do not think it frivolous," said Gerald, "but may I ask where you obtained these spoons?"

The delicate silver spoon with which he was stirring his coffee bore the crest and monogram of the Brinkerhoffs. Mr. Grant looked up quickly. "They were the gift of a friend," he said.

"My mother was a Brinkerhoff," said Gerald.

"Miss Mercy Brinkerhoff presented me with those spoons and this coffee urn," said the minister.

"She is my aunt," explained Gerald.

"Oh, I am very glad," said Mr. Grant, heartily. "This quite justifies my interest in you and anything I may be able to do for you, would give me great pleasure as repaying in a small measure her kindness to me."

"How strange!" exclaimed Gerald. "I did not know that Aunt Mercy had any acquaintances outside of her poor people at home, and the limited circle of an old maid's sphere in the world."

"You do not know her," said Mr. Grant. "She is a remarkable woman. I am only her steward in the administration of her charities."

"Please tell me about it," said Gerald.

"I met her on the steamer when we were returning from Europe, four years ago," said Mr. Grant, "and she took a great interest in me. I have learned since that she was engaged to my father in her youth. It was the usual story of disappointed love caused by the interference of relatives. She lavished the most particular kindness upon me at a time when I had just passed through a trying experience and was not far from the verge of despair. She expressed the discontent caused by her limited opportunities of action, and I told her how the strength of my manhood was rendered inactive by poverty. I did not dare to refuse the offer of a lucrative position as rector of a small aristocratic parish; and I was returning from a two years' course in a German university to begin a life of selfish ease, the prospect of which tormented my conscience. She saved me from myself. She gave me the means to consecrate myself to work among the poor. She built me a chapel, a mission school, and started a coffee house and a dispensary. She denies herself very closely to furnish all that is necessary to promote these schemes. We work in absolute harmony, though in the unfortunate divisions of the Christian Church she is called a Congregationalist, and I an Episcopalian. She recognizes the value to me of the church organization which is behind me to reinforce my efforts. Nowadays, no workman stands alone or outside of an organization. The Church must widen its borders and

unite its ranks into a more solid phalanx if it is to conquer sin, and banish poverty and vice. In spite of my sincere loyalty to the Church I am frowned upon in certain circles as a schismatic and a radical. I often say that Miss Mercy is my bishop. She visits me once a year and we review the successes of the last twelve-month and lay new plans for the future. When her income will allow, we are to have a block of model tenement houses. You can realize now, how glad I am to make the acquaintance of her nephew. If I am not mistaken she has written me concerning you."

He reflected a moment. "Yes, I am sure of it," he continued. "Your name is Gerald Maynard, is it not? I will find the letter."

He rummaged in his desk, and drew forth a package of letters, neatly sorted and numbered, and sinking into his easy chair he began to look them over with the retrospective attention which we give to that which has caused a past satisfaction that we willingly revive.

"The coffee-house—need of a suitable person to take charge—would suggest—hum—hum—Mrs. Brandege's lame leg—get a specialist—spare no money. Bishop ——'s criticism need not trouble you—early Christians in the catacombs—hum. Oh, here it is: 'My nephew Gerald is a weight upon my mind.' Forgive me. I had forgotten that she took that tone. I knew that she expressed a certain anxiety——"

Gerald laughed. "Read it to me, if you choose," he said. "I can bear it."

"Well, here goes," said Mr. Grant, smiling. "I hoped that his pretty young wife would lead him to take more correct views of religion ; but I hear that he belongs to a club which is especially noted for profane discussions of sacred things. Now, you know, my dear Allen, that I am not bigoted. We have no time to go out of our way to convert agnostics who live behind an armor of comfortable self-complacency. I am not angry at them for doubting, if they cannot help it ; but I cannot forgive them for spreading abroad the poisonous seed that will take root in other hearts. Why is every unbeliever so zealous for proselytes to his creed of negation ? Why can you not be with him ten minutes before he flings his declaration of want of faith in your face with an air of challenge ? You know that Goethe makes the devil say, *I am the spirit that denies*. This uneasy need of denial possesses them, and they must forever be talking about it. Gerald Maynard belongs to a club that not only makes blasphemous speeches, but publishes them, and sows them on the wind for all to read. He sent me one such pamphlet, and I flung it into the fire ; then I sat down and cried over my sister's child. I wish you could meet him. You would do him good."

Mr. Grant looked up and caught Gerald's eye.

"Poor Aunt Mercy," said Gerald, shrugging his shoulders. "I thank her for her interest in me ; but I did not know there was anything so dreadful in my friend Emil Franz's clever tract on *Immortality in De-*

*scent.* He gives an original turn to the old idea, that our future life is in our children or in those who feel the influence we leave behind us. I sent it to Aunt Mercy because she had bored me by forwarding to me a monthly report of a charity mission school. Now I think of it, it must have been yours. It described the coffee-house you mention, too. Why did I not read it?"

His tone of regret was so naïve that Mr. Grant laughed, as he answered, "I will introduce you at the coffee-house. We are very proud of it. We have been looking for some one to play the melodeon in the evenings. Perhaps, since you are a musician, you will do that."

"I am waiting for you to tell me what to do," said Gerald. "I have no plans for the future. If you set me to playing a melodeon, I will do that as willingly as anything."

He spoke in a tone of discouragement, and the corners of his mouth drooped wearily.

"Let me help you," said Mr. Grant, heartily. "Give me the power."

"No one can help me," replied Gerald. "Life is so difficult. The easiest way was the one I chose, to end it all. Since I have given that up, I am confronted by an insoluble problem. I cannot state it so that you will understand it. It has a sensational sound. I am married to a charming girl who loves me, and yet I love another to whom I have always been tacitly pledged.

A French novelist would make a telling plot from those data, but he would miss the inner tragedy of the situation which tortures me. Massey loves me, and Reine loves me, and both are good women whom I respect and honor, and both must suffer by my fault."

"You thought that to take your life would better secure their happiness?" asked Mr. Grant.

"Yes, and I was right as far as that goes," urged Gerald. "They would have grieved for me, but they are young and elastic, and could easily re-adjust their lives to new conditions. I feel like an actor who has taken a dignified farewell of the stage, and then comes back on a frivolous pretext for a new scene which upsets the other players and spoils the piece. I wrote a letter and posted it the evening before I meant to die; and, living, I must regret it."

A blush had mounted to his cheeks and burned there as he spoke. He buried his face in his hands. Mr. Grant was embarrassed by a half confidence which gave him no power to judge or to advise.

"I was a consummate fool," groaned Gerald. "The prospect of death made me pose for a hero as Werther does through a dozen tedious chapters which we are willing to endure; but fancy him, throwing away the poison or the pistol, and waking up next morning to take a boiled egg and a cup of coffee. We could never forgive him!"

He laughed nervously.

"You have done right," said Mr. Grant. "Life is



difficult, but it has its joys. Let us take it as it is, and make the best of it."

"I wrote to the woman I love that I should perish for her sake," continued Gerald. "I told her that life was insupportable with a divided duty and a tortured heart. At this moment she fancies me lying dead. My wife, too, is no doubt distracted with anxiety. I must send word to both that at the last moment my courage failed me, and beg them to excuse my cowardice."

"You are upset by what you have been through," said Mr. Grant, soothingly. "You must rest awhile and recover yourself. After that you will feel that the path of duty is the only one to follow. Return to your wife. Your place is by her side. Marriage is an ordinance of God, not a thing that can be set aside by personal caprice. Without knowing more of the circumstances of the case, I feel that I, as the minister of the Lord, have the right to urge you to take up your life again, at the point where you meant to lay it down."

Gerald compressed his lips with the old air of obstinate determination.

"I do not recognize your authority in this matter," he said. "A marriage without love does not seem to me to be a holy thing."

"Why did you marry a woman whom you could not love?" asked Mr. Grant with a touch of severity in his tone.

Gerald blushed. "She loved me," he answered, "and she had money and influence. It was to a great extent a matter of mercenary calculation."

Mr. Grant looked over Gerald's head to a strip of blue sky between the rows of houses. "That is our curse," he said, "the love of money and the love of self. Is there one of us who deserves the love of a good woman?"

Gerald was surprised at the tone of this reply, which was so free from the exaltation of the minister above the sinner. He thought with tenderer regret of Massey and her affection for him.

"No," he said fervently, "we do not deserve it. I would gladly spare her every sorrow, but to take up the old life in the old way is impossible. Let me stay with you for a while. I will play the melodeon at your coffee-house, and the organ at your chapel. If Aunt Mercy is your bishop, perhaps she will accept me as a neophyte asking for instruction under your ministry."

"If you will not follow my advice you may stay with me of course," said Mr. Grant. "I do not wish to lose sight of you. I accept you very gladly as an assistant."

"I must send a message to relieve my wife's anxiety," said Gerald, springing to his feet. "At what hour shall I meet you at the coffee-house?"

"At six this evening," answered Mr. Grant.

"If you will give me the address I will be there at that hour."

"And meantime?"

"Oh, you may trust me," replied Gerald. "I shall never again become an imitator of the melancholy Werther since in tragedy or melodrama I am so decided a failure."

The streets were astir with the busy traffic of the morning, as Gerald left the minister's house and picked his way over slippery sidewalks encumbered with crates and boxes, barrels and trucks, delivering and receiving goods from market and warehouse. He was jostled by workmen and men of business hurrying to their place of labor, and his ears were greeted by the jingle, rattle, and roar that result from the restless energy of an awakened city. Life rudely manifested and oblivious to everything but active forces, made an endless current in which he was glad to be a living factor. He pushed and hurried among the rest, conscious of each breath and movement. This was better than to lie a stolid, unseeing, unresponsive clod.

On a corner he saw a little Italian boy who held up a tray of English violets disposed in bunches. Answering the silent appeal in the boy's wistful eyes he bought a bunch, remembering that Massey loved to wear them on her bosom. They should accompany the note of explanation which he meant to send her. He entered a small book-store, and purchased some stationery from a smiling Jewess with large gilt earrings, who allowed him to write at a table encumbered with yellow-covered novels. She looked over his

shoulder as she passed and re-passed, apparently interested in the fact that with the bunch of violets before him, he sat with pen suspended, without writing a word.

Believing that her customer stood in need of assistance, the friendly attendant laid open before him a small, cheaply-bound book, while she pointed with a fat finger to a certain portion of the page. "Ain't that what will help you?" she asked with a sympathetic grin.

Gerald started, and his eyes fell upon the Complete Letter Writer's Model of a Love Letter to a Lady accompanying a Gift. He pushed the book away with a sigh. It was impossible to put into words his kindly feeling, his gratitude for the past, and the cruelty of his purpose for the future. He took a visiting card and wrote on it the date and the German words *Glück Auf*. No form of expression so foreign to its purpose could be found in the pages of the Complete Letter Writer; but nothing else occurred to his bewildered brain, tormented by the vision of gilt ear-rings and piercing black eyes. The note to Reine was a simpler matter. He dipped his pen in the ink and rapidly scrawled these lines: "I am still alive. I could not leave the world while you were in it."

A district messenger office on a neighboring street undertook the delivery of these missives at their respective destinations, and Gerald then found himself without an object and with the day on his hands. He

was already weary of the noises of the street. The bustle of business had lost to his fancy its early alacrity, and had become a tiresome treadmill round.

He entered a church whose doors stood invitingly open, and, seating himself upon a bench, he enjoyed the shaded silence, and watched the chance worshippers who came and went, making the round of altar and shrine. They knelt and told their beads, dipped their fingers in holy water, and made the sign of the cross, departing strengthened and refreshed.

"There is a Word revealed to men that I have not understood," he thought. "This church, Aunt Mercy's chapel, the whole vast system of Christianity grows out of a deeper need than can be satisfied by the evolution of our higher nature out of its past. We are religious animals, but our religion comes upon us from without. It descends like the sunlight."

He sat in his corner until the bell rang for service, and an acolyte came to light the candles on the altar. Then he hurried out. He walked in the Park, and dined at a cheap lunch-room, whiling away the remaining hours of the afternoon in a picture-gallery and a reading-room. The pictures he saw seemed crude and lifeless—the book he read failed to impress even its title upon his memory. At the appointed hour he made his way to the coffee-house where he had agreed to meet his new friend. He had looked forward to

this meeting as to an objective point in a dreary day ; but he wondered what interest he should find in playing a melodeon before an audience composed of the dwellers in this quarter, one of the most unpromising in the East Side.

## CHAPTER XIV.

ALLEN GRANT met him at the door and welcomed him heartily. "I feared you might not come. I had the idea that you might disappoint me," he said.

"My friends always have that idea about me; I do not know why," responded Gerald. "I suppose it is because I usually disappoint them, sooner or later."

The coffee-house had several customers at this hour, men and women with dingy clothes and besotted faces, and a few young workingmen and factory girls who paid their five cents for a cup of coffee and a generous sandwich, which they consumed seated at small, neat tables. They stared about impressed with the novelty of their surroundings. A few entered the reading-room, but no one disturbed the piles of newspapers and magazines arranged upon the table, or tried the open melodeon where the hymns of Moody and Sankey were invitingly displayed.

An elderly woman stood at a counter dispensing coffee and making change, but the presiding genius of the place was a young woman who hovered about the stove in the small rear kitchen where fragrant fumes arose. She wore a dark cloth dress and a large

enveloping apron, and she turned a flushed and smiling face upon the young minister as he entered the room, inviting Gerald to follow him.

"I have brought the friend I promised to present to you," said Allen, and Gerald, approaching, found himself face to face with Miss Linton. Both started, and, by way of exclamation, each uttered the other's name.

"You need no introduction then," said Allen in surprise.

"Oh, no," said Miss Linton. "We are old friends. What an odd chance it is, and how small the world is after all!"

She was so much embarrassed by the intrusion of the past upon the present that she failed to notice Gerald's equal discomfiture.

"I suppose that Massey has told you my secret," she said. "I saw her day before yesterday. Although I live down here I occasionally emerge upon the surface of society and make calls in Madison Avenue. Mrs. Grayling still takes me about with her in her carriage, though she cannot forgive me for jilting her cousin—the phrase is hers, not mine—and she calls our work here fanatical folly. The coffee is done, Mr. Grant. Will you carry it in to Mrs. Smith?"

"I had not heard of your broken engagement," said Gerald, seating himself opposite her upon a wooden chair.

"Then I was foolish to mention it," she said. "You will think me egotistical to allude to my affairs."



I did not know that Massey would practice such reserve, for I made no condition of secrecy. In fact I wished to receive the credit of my change of heart from those of my friends whose good opinion I value. I am thoroughly ashamed of my purpose of making a mercenary marriage."

She blushed as she spoke, for Gerald had involuntarily given a meaning glance after the athletic figure of the young minister.

"Poor Mr. Berkeley!" he said.

"He is to be congratulated," she replied. "And so are you, in fact, for Massey told me the delightful news concerning your sonata. Blavatsky is to play it at his recital, it seems; and this is the evening for it. I took pains to secure a couple of seats."

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said Gerald, "but my sonata no longer exists. 'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter,' you know. You will imagine it a finer thing than it ever would have been in the production."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Have you destroyed it?"

"Yes, and my past with it," he answered.

"You alarm me, Mr. Maynard," she exclaimed. "Do assure me that you are not in earnest, that nothing dreadful has happened. I do not ask from idle curiosity. I love Massey dearly."

"Poor Massey!" said Gerald. "You express no pity for Mr. Berkeley, but some one must suffer when a

mistake of mercenary calculation is atoned for. When we straighten the crooked branch of our destiny we break the tendrils that cling to it."

His look was so serious that Miss Linton did not dare to urge upon him the eager questions that crowded to her lips.

"Massey was so delighted at your success," she remarked. "Is it really true that your sonata will not be played this evening?"

Gerald nodded.

"Then she will not go to the concert, and neither shall I," she exclaimed. "I no longer take an interest in it. It is too great a disappointment."

"Change your mind and let me accompany you. I am hungry for music," he said, "and I am in the condition of the man whose house is empty, swept, and garnished. It invites the occupation of devils. I will throw myself upon your charity and tell you, for I can trust you, that I have left my wife without an explanation as yet, but definitely and forever."

"Oh, you cruel man!" exclaimed Miss Linton, clasping her hands in horror. "When she loves you so! How can you dare? What is your reason?"

"I cannot tell you the reason, but it is a sufficient one," he said. "Of course I must see her again; we must settle the future between us; but just now I am too out of tune, too wretched. I could not endure to see her suffer. It is cruel, as you say. I must have time to think it over and decide clearly and definitely."

It would do me good to listen to Blavatsky's music this evening, and forget myself for a while."

"A man who meditates a crime cannot forget himself," said Miss Linton grimly. "But take my tickets. You are welcome to them, and they are quite useless to me. Allen Grant will go with you, perhaps, if you represent your case to him as one of moral necessity. He never refuses an appeal for help. As for me I am still unregenerate enough to hate those who injure my friends. Count me your enemy after this, Mr. Maynard."

Gerald stood hesitating with the tickets in his hand. "I am sorry," he said. "I value your friendship for Massey, and I do not like to accept a favor from you on these terms."

"It is a trifle," she said, "and you owe me no thanks, for I wish you no good." She turned and left him with a gesture of disdain.

Gerald was overcome by the chagrin of a sensitive nature to which blame is torture. He rejoined Mr. Grant in the outer room.

"Come with me," he said, "and do an act of charity."

"What is it?" asked the minister, surprised at the urgency of his manner.

"I am possessed by a demon that can be driven out only by music," replied Gerald. "Come with me to Blavatsky's recital. Do not leave me to my own devices."

Mr. Grant hesitated.

"You were going with Miss Linton, perhaps?" said Gerald.

"No. You are wrong," said Allen, and, as he followed Gerald into the street, he added, "We go nowhere together. Five years ago I asked her to marry me, and, though she loved me, she refused. We were both poor, and she was intensely ambitious for my success in life. When lately she threw herself into my work here with the charming enthusiasm which dignifies its meanest details, I dared to believe that she did it for my sake. I proposed and was again refused. I had misunderstood her. She loved me too well to marry me, she said. Our poverty was still a barrier. She had a dozen good reasons for rejecting me; and to support her position she surrounds our meetings with severe formality. We are comrades and fellow-workers in the same cause. That is all." He sighed as he glanced at his companion. "I give you my confidence in return for yours," he added.

"You are fortunate compared with me," Gerald responded. "You deserve happiness, and will no doubt some day secure it. I wish you success with all my heart."

"Thank you," said Mr. Grant, and, changing the subject, he began to speak of Blavatsky's music, and agreed to accompany Gerald to the concert.

The vast space of Music Hall was crowded to its utmost capacity, tier upon tier, with a fashionable and

enthusiastic audience ; for, besides the lovers of music, those came who realized that Blavatsky's concerts were a social function. Gerald's heart swelled at the sight of the expectant multitude, the empty stage, and the grand piano awaiting the master's touch. He felt half stifled with the excitement of a suddenly renewed ambition.

"We have no programmes," he said to his companion as he seated himself. "I left it for you to take them at the door."

"No matter," said Mr. Grant. "I rejected them involuntarily as I do a street hand-bill. I do not know enough about music to care for the names of the composers, and you know it well enough to do without them."

The appearance of Blavatsky was greeted by a storm of applause which sank into silence as he touched the keys. He held the great audience spell-bound by the magic of his performance. The rapture of intelligent appreciation, which caused Gerald to lose consciousness of time and place and vexing cares, while following the intricate paths opened into the realm of melodious thought, was supplied in other minds by a vivid consciousness of the master's interesting personality, or by a pleasing sense of assisting at a popular success. At the close of the number, the promulgators of social edicts applauded loudly as if to give conspicuous assent to the artist's worthiness for the benefit of their followers in box or parquet, who, thus encouraged, exclaimed

with rapture, "What execution! What technique!" and settled themselves with a sigh of resignation to endure another ten minutes of conversational restraint.

The artist, recognizing the temper of his audience, condescended to it. He would not have become the darling of the fashionable world if he had not yielded now and then to its need of amusement at the expense of the strict rules of art. He did not disdain occasionally to interpret the work of a musical mountebank, or to include among his severe effects the methods of the virtuoso. It is the power of adaptation to the temper of the age, which brings success to genius, while the fanatical stickler for perfection starves among his ideals.

Gerald listened uneasily to a brilliant rendering of such a number, and half against his will joined in the applause, well deserved by the musician's audacious force. After a pause the pianist, with a quick change of subject, struck some powerful opening chords, and Gerald started as if he had heard his name called from the stage. Leaning forward he begged the loan of a programme from an elderly gentleman who sat in front of him, and who frowned at the interruption while he did not refuse the favor.

"Look," said Gerald in an agitated whisper, and Allen Grant read for the last number on the programme,

*Sonata (A Major)*

*Gerald Maynard.*

"It is a miracle," exclaimed Gerald, trembling with emotion.

"Did you not expect it?" Allen inquired in surprise.

"No. Listen. How well he does it!" said Gerald. "He is a wonderful artist." For the first time he recognized the secret of Blavatsky's power, and the depth of his sympathy in interpretation. He brought out meanings of which Gerald himself had been unconscious, but which he recognized as a necessary part of his conception. The pianist gave to his performance the best and most generous devices of his skill, but it was done with conscientious rectitude. The burst of applause which followed was Gerald's first taste of a satisfied ambition. Round after round followed. Floral tributes were carried to the stage. The performer refused an *encore* and bowed himself out.

The audience began pouring from the exits. Gerald rose, thrilled with emotion, his eyes shining with happy feeling, and, as he turned about in his place, he found himself face to face with Massey, who sat directly behind him. He gave a quick exclamation and held out both his hands.

"Massey, you have done this! How can I thank you?" he exclaimed.

Massey looked at him with a peculiar smile. Her hands were busy with her cloak which Mrs. Vance was placing for her about her shoulders. The crowd was pushing and elbowing. Concerted action was required to enable people to keep together, and neither Mrs. Vance nor Massey were disposed to join Maynard

and his companion. Gerald bent towards his wife and whispered, "Oh, Massey, I owe you a lifetime of gratitude. I have always said that miracles do not happen, but I know now that there are miracles of love."

Massey colored quickly, and tears rose to her eyes.

"Massey is with me now," interposed Mrs. Vance.

"Come and see us to-morrow."

Gerald started, but was not allowed a reply, for Mrs. Vance had turned away, and a dozen people hurrying from their places had interposed. He took his companion's arm. "You must be my confessor. You must tell me what to do," he said, when they were in the street. "This has changed everything. I must no longer think of my wishes, but I must sacrifice myself for Massey's sake. Do you understand what she has done for me? This sonata was to make my fame. She knew how my heart was set upon it; and when I burned it in a moment of desperation, she found my original copy, scattered fragments which I had thrown away; she pieced it together, copied it, and sent it to Blavatsky in time for him to render it to-night as he had promised. And she did this at a time when another woman would have been prostrated by grief and self-pity. For I had deserted her. She must have guessed it. She was tormented by suspense and jealousy. Do you recognize the self-restraint, the noble generosity of her conduct? It is wonderful, admirable!"



"Your wife is a Christian," said Mr. Grant, simply. This brief sentence changed the agitated current of Gerald's emotion.

"And I have been a pagan, an egotist," he cried. "Tell me what to do. Give me your advice."

"Go to her and entreat her forgiveness. Then follow the dictates of duty," was the answer. "Forget yourself and live for her happiness, since it has been given into your charge."

Maynard pondered deeply. "Renunciation of self is your ideal," he said. "You Christians admire the spirit which could produce and canonize a Simon Stylites. It is an instinct with women to maim their being for those they love. That is the reason that Christianity attracts them. If I make a sacrifice of my life for Massey I am not sure that my conscience will approve the deed. It would be simply an impulse of gratitude followed to an extreme conclusion."

"Reason it as you may, it is a manly thing to show gratitude," said Grant. "A true Christian is a manly man. You are mistaken in supposing that its tendency is to effeminacy on the one hand, and asceticism on the other. The true joy of living comes through self-sacrifice."

"Oh, yes, we preach altruism and practice it too," said Maynard, "but it seems to me that the root of all our speculations and of your teachings is only a deeper selfishness. Do good and you will be happy. Avoid sin, and you will go to heaven."

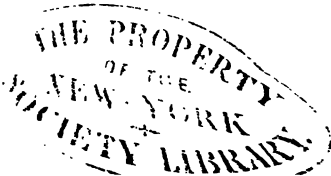
"You do not state correctly the Master's teachings," replied Grant. "'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.' Ponder those words and reach their deepest meaning, and you will find no root of self or of self-seeking."

Maynard paused and extended his hand to his friend.

"Good-night," he said. "I will take leave of you here. If I make my peace with Massey I will come to-morrow evening to play the melodeon for Miss Linton, for in that case she would withdraw the declaration of hostility with which we parted. Thank you for your kindness. You do not know how much I owe to you. Some day when gratitude is more than a duty I will tell you."

He hastened away, full of an agitation of feeling which found relief in active motion. He could not hesitate or philosophize further. An irresistible impulse led him to hurry to Massey and lay his future at her feet.

A mother whose favorite child is fondly commended feels a glow of gratitude which lives in her memory ; but more sensitive than maternal tenderness is the love of an artist for the spirit of his work, the intangible essence which at the same time dominates him, and is subject to his will. He is so used to coldness, to half-hearted appreciation, to misunderstanding, to praise too lavish and to blame too quick, that the rare and perfect sympathy which makes his ambition seem



to another all that it seems to him, and justifies to himself his most extravagant hopes, is welcomed as a gift from heaven. Maynard realized that his wife loved him well enough to sacrifice her woman's jealousy upon the altar of his fame. She had put his work first and foremost, holding to a faith which he had basely deserted. He had triumphed through her devotion.

Reine was herself an artist, full of the changing moods, the zeal for glory and the doubt of self which alternately exalt and depress the artistic consciousness. She had accepted the useless sacrifice of his dearest ambition in the spirit of the lady of tradition, who could fling her glove among the lions and smile when her knight ventured his life at the challenge.

"She has my love, but Massey deserves my life," he said to himself, well content with the phrase and with the generosity of his mood as he ascended the steps of Mr. Vance's house and rang the bell. A sleepy footman admitted him and showed him into the library, where he lighted the burners that had just been extinguished, obeying the command of the master of the house who, in dressing-gown and slippers, had been seated in the dark before a flickering fire. Mr. Vance came forward with a ceremonious bow and motioned his guest to a seat.

"It is late, and I was about to retire," he said.

"It is not an hour for a call, but I could not sleep

without offering to Massey a word of explanation," began Maynard.

"An explanation is required, but you will make it, if you please, to me," answered Mr. Vance. "Massey is too ill to bear any more nervous excitement. She rose from a sick-bed to attend the recital. She insisted upon going, although the doctor had forbidden her leaving the house. My wife told me that the poor girl almost fainted when she saw you seated in front of her."

"She is ill? She has a doctor? and I did not know it!"

"She might have died alone without your knowing it!"

Gerald grew pale while he clutched nervously at the arm of his chair. Mr. Vance seemed even less at ease. He paced up and down with his head bent and his good-humored face distorted by anxious distress.

"It is a sort of poetical justice that this should come upon me," he said in a hoarse voice. "Massey's life is wrecked, and her happiness sacrificed by your conduct, while her strength was broken down in a last effort to keep her promise to you that Anton Blavatsky should play your music. I urged you to marry my beautiful niece more than half against your will, under the pretence that it would insure for you Blavatsky's assistance in your musical career, while, at that time, I had no idea that he would care to help you. I wished to gain Massey's happiness at any

price ; but I should have known that you were not fitted to make her happy. It is my fault. Would to God that I could bear the punishment ! I can do nothing for my darling child but watch her pine and die before my eyes without the power to help her." His voice ended in a groan.

"Oh, do not say so !" cried Maynard. "It is not so bad as that. Happiness will cure her. I will make her happy, I promise you. I owe it to her in the future. I will make any sacrifice. Let me see her now, and I will beg her to forgive me."

"She is too ill to see you," said Mr. Vance sternly. "She must not be disturbed. She came home just now in a fainting condition."

"Massey loves me," said Gerald, "and if she is suffering it is because you have tried to separate us. I saw it in her eyes when Mrs. Vance prevented her from speaking to me at the concert."

"The separation is of your making, not ours," said Mr. Vance ; "but I hope you understand that it is final."

"No, by Heaven !" cried Gerald. "I shall not allow you to part me from my wife. The law will sustain me in my rights."

Mr. Vance sank into a chair and looked at the angry young man in unfeigned amazement.

"Have you been in an unconscious condition for the last few days ?" he asked, "or have you forgotten all that has occurred ?"

"I know nothing of what may have happened among you in my absence," rejoined Maynard. "I left Massey Thursday morning, and I saw her again at the concert this evening. Not being allowed a word with her, I am ignorant as to how she has passed the last two days."

"You know, at least, how you have been occupied, or, in regard to that, I may be able to refresh your memory," said Mr. Vance. "When you left your home, did you purpose to return?"

Maynard hesitated.

"You left with the intention of committing suicide," continued Mr. Vance, "and you wrote to your friend Miss Chapman acquainting her with your motive for the deed."

"I was beside myself," stammered Maynard. "I hardly knew what I was doing. I am not sure what I wrote."

"Massey could tell you, for she has seen the letter," said Mr. Vance.

Gerald fell back upon his seat, realizing the hopelessness of his case. "Please tell me all that has occurred," he said in a choking voice.

"I can hardly command myself sufficiently to talk to you," said Mr. Vance. "Only the consciousness of my own grave fault in urging your marriage gives me patience to allow your presence for a moment within this house whose hospitality you have abused." He clinched his hands and breathed heavily like a man

in mortal agony. "I love her so much, and it is I who have brought this upon her," he added under his breath; then, rousing himself, he continued: "Massey was rendered very anxious and unhappy by your manner of taking leave. She felt that it threatened something desperate; but she would not allow herself to brood over it. She thought that she had a mission to perform. You had burned the precious piece of music which she hoped was to make you famous. She determined to reproduce it from the scattered notes you had left. It took her many hours to make good what you had destroyed in a few seconds. When she had finished her work she had still an anxious night to spend alone, but in the morning she rose feeling more cheerful and sure that you would soon return. She was called from the breakfast-table to answer the questions of a detective, who told her that you had been discovered to be suffering from suicidal mania, and had left the house of a friend at four o'clock in the morning with the purpose of taking your life. Massey had a suspicion, only too well founded, it seems, that Miss Chapman might know more concerning you. She went to her without coming to us for counsel, because she did not wish to expose you till the last moment. Miss Chapman had no reassurance to give. She had that morning received a letter from you announcing your intention of ending your life. She showed Massey the letter."

Maynard bent his head upon his hands.

"Massey repeated it to me almost word for word," continued Mr. Vance. "It seemed to be photographed upon her memory, though you, as you say, have forgotten it. You explained to Miss Chapman that your love for her made your life a torment, and urged you to break the fetters that bound you to another. Since circumstances restrained you within limits which made your life a lie, you had determined to take the only path open to you, and to die a martyr to love and duty. Of course I do not recall the words, only the main idea."

"How could she do it? How could she hurt Massey so needlessly?" exclaimed Gerald.

"After your part in it, can you feel such compunctions?" asked Mr. Vance ironically. "I do not know what passed between them, but women have no pity for each other. Massey reached our house prostrated with her double sorrow, and has only risen from her bed to go, as I said, to the concert. Of course she could not have done that without having had the assurance of your safety which she did not receive, as it happened, until this afternoon. My wife chanced to find your bunch of violets, and the singularly flippant greeting written on your card, when she called at your house hoping for some news of you. The reaction of feeling was almost as crushing to Massey as the fear of your death had been, for it gave her new torments of jealousy, if that is the word I should apply



to the agony of humiliation which you have inflicted upon her."

"It would have been better if I had died," groaned Maynard.

"Better still if she had never met you," said Mr. Vance. "That is where I suffer, and where I am to blame. Let it pass. We must take our life as we find it. She is young, and I hope her vigorous constitution will recover from the blow, and that change of scene, and all that loving friends can devise for her help, may comfort her sad heart. We shall leave for Germany as soon as her health permits."

"She will not go without a word to me," said Maynard.

"No, she insists upon seeing you without delay. You may come to-morrow morning at ten," replied Mr. Vance.

Gerald left the house in deep dejection, wondering at the light-hearted expectations with which he had entered it ; but in spite of the increased weight of his remorse he could not stifle the conviction that Massey's love would prove stronger than her jealousy. The fact that, against the wishes of her relatives, she insisted on an early interview with him, encouraged him to hope that he should still be permitted to prove his sincere repentance ; and vanity assured him that once under the influence of his look and voice, Massey's tender heart could not resist his pleadings.

## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Gerald Maynard entered his lonely home he realized the desolation which the lack of Massey's presence caused in the empty rooms where everything suggested her. He seemed to hear her musical laugh, and the light rustle of her gown. It must be that she was near at hand, and would come from the adjoining room and look over his shoulder while he sat with an open book on which he fixed his eyes under the pretext of reading, fearing the intrusion of the servants who might be aroused by his unexpected return. No one came to disturb him, and he flung aside his book and leaned his head upon his hand, conscious for the first time of an overpowering fatigue. Loss of sleep, excitement, and hunger began to tell upon him. He trembled with weakness, and shivered from the cold. His eyes fell upon the red roses which Massey had placed by chance beneath Reine's portrait. The petals had fallen withered from the stems. Reine's eyes still encountered his smilingly.

"Heaven help me," he murmured. "It was that smile that drove me half mad."

He turned aside and swallowed a glass of wine which

he took from a chimney cupboard ; then he entered his bedroom and flung himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, drawing a heavy coverlet about him. He fell asleep under the impression that Massey was out late at a dinner as had more than once been the case, and that she would return and find him there awaiting her.

The housemaid, roaming through the rooms next morning, duster in hand, came upon the sleeping figure of the master of the house lying across the bed in the broad daylight, and she rushed, screaming, to tell the cook. Maynard rose and confronted the two who peered at him through the door with wide startled eyes.

"The saints preserve us, I thought you were dead, sir," said the cook, flinging her apron over her head in a burst of hysterical laughter.

"And it was the fancy I had when I saw you there, asking your pardon for disturbing you," said Mary. "Shall I set the table for you and the mistress, Mr. Maynard?"

"Get me something to eat at once. I am starving," cried Gerald, fiercely, and he vouchsafed no explanation to the curious domestics who served him with significant exchanges of winks and whispers between kitchen and pantry during the meal.

"He's driven her from the house. There's a scandal at the bottom of it," said Bridget.

"It's guilty he looks the day," said Mary, "and he

ates like a tramp ; three helps of mate, and the rest in proportion. He's been up to no good this while."

Gerald had finished his breakfast when Frank Bumstead made his appearance. He came hurrying in, with extended hands and a face in which eager delight succeeded reproachful anxiety.

"Thank God you are alive and well," he said. "What a chase you have led your best friends. I have grown ten years older in a day. Reine has been prostrated with anxiety. But let us be thankful that it is over and done with. We will try and forget everything but the delight of your presence. Give me your hand again. Let me be sure that you are herein flesh and blood."

"I do not deserve that you should be good to me, Bumstead," said Gerald. "I am heartily ashamed of myself. I wish that I could obliterate the events of the last two days."

"Do not think of it ; what does it matter now ?" said Frank. "We cannot always be responsible for our impulses and their results. I have often reproached myself for a fit of ill temper which I knew was directly traceable to a lobster salad, or something of the sort, that did not agree with me. Reine and I have both forgiven you. I am not sure that Mrs. Chapman is so charitable. She can never forget what we have suffered at the hands of the newspaper reporters."

"What do you mean ?" asked Maynard quickly. "Oh, I should not have mentioned it. It is a most

vexatious thing," replied Bumstead. "The story of your attempted suicide was published in half-a-dozen exaggerated forms. We refused all information to the reporters, but in some way they obtained possession of Reine's photograph, and they reproduced that by a stroke of enterprise in yesterday's *Vulture*, and gave a list of her paintings at the Academy, and Heaven knows what else entirely foreign to the subject. I went around to every office and threatened them with a suit for libel. I was furious enough to challenge the whole force, down to the printer's devil, who laughed in my face. I suppose I was ridiculous. I am not cut out for heavy tragedy."

Maynard had grown pale. "What did they say about Reine?" he asked, breathing heavily.

"Oh, the story was on these lines :—an unhappy marriage ; a wife's jealousy ; a hopeless attachment to a golden-haired artist ; death preferred to separation. I burnt the abominable trash. In certain articles an unfavorable color was given to Reine's share in the matter ; but in general her high character and local celebrity as an artist of promise were testified to unanimously. Mrs. Chapman has been in a lamentable state. She speaks of the injury to Reine's reputation,—as if any one could pay serious attention to a newspaper sensation."

Maynard had buried his face in his hands with a groan, and he now started up and began to pace the floor distractedly.

"Oh, Frank, this is terrible," he said. "Who can have given such publicity to my affairs? Who gave information to the reporters? By what unhappy chance was Reine's name mentioned?"

"I do not know," answered Bumstead. "I have spent the night thinking of it, and I have suspected half a dozen rival artists, no doubt most unjustly, since the unfortunate advertisement of her work has brought Reine more orders than she could fill if she cared to try. It has occurred to me to suspect Mr. Smith the tea-man. I am inclined to think it must be he. You know that insignificant little man with his sly, insinuating ways, and sharp, uneasy eyes. Mrs. Chapman is consumed with the ambition that he shall be her son-in-law. She would believe evil of me rather than of him."

"I have never seen the man," said Maynard. "He takes pains to avoid me. But if he is Reine's suitor he would not be willing to do her an injury."

"He would like to injure you, no doubt," said Bumstead. "But let us try to forget the subject. Reine behaves admirably. Since she is spared the shocking reality of your suicide, everything else is easily borne, she says. Oh, Maynard, how could you think of it?"

"How does one think of a crime, Frank? It comes from an inner unsuspected source of depravity in one's nature, and it grows into a gigantic impulse before one is conscious of admitting it, like the genius in the

*Arabian Nights* who escapes from the bottle when the seal is broken. It is so easy to let loose the evil spirit, and the consequences are so irrevocable and so impossible to foresee."

Bumstead was about to essay a cheerful remark, when the door opened, and the maid admitted Rudolph Blackman. He shook hands with the two friends, not heeding the lack of cordiality in their greeting.

"I congratulate you, Maynard, on your reappearance upon the stage where we are all merely players," he said. "The tragic manner of your farewell was extremely successful. You have occupied half a column in several dailies at once. Who could wish for greater fame?" Then changing his tone he added quickly: "It is abominable that the affair was allowed to appear in print. It must be extremely annoying to your wife. I have taken means to contradict everything that has been said."

"I am not sure that your interference will better the matter," said Gerald. "I have no cause to believe in your friendship, Blackman."

Rudolph raised his eyebrows.

"You are angry because I allowed you to have your own way," he said. "Would you have thanked me if I had interfered? Would my arguments or entreaties have changed your purpose? I should never think of arguing with a man bent on self-destruction, but treat him as a dangerous lunatic who must be watched and restrained."

"I had seen or heard nothing of this newspaper scandal until Bumstead brought me news of it," said Gerald. "What can be done? What have you tried to do?"

"I have written a letter to the editor of the *Vulture*, which sheet is chiefly responsible, regretting the exaggeration into which his valuable paper has been betrayed, and explaining that the only foundation for the story was a bet made between myself and a friend on the occasion of my notorious *danse macabre* upon the question of the possibility of deceiving the public by a pretended suicide. I elaborate the details until my *explanation* becomes plausible. I am sufficiently well known, I imagine, to run no risk of contradiction."

Maynard extended his hand. "I thank you for your good-will," he said. "I have been unreasonable. My friends are better to me than I deserve."

"It was a clever idea," said Bumstead. "I am thankful for anything that leaves the ladies out of consideration."

"How is Mrs. Maynard supporting what must be so extremely distasteful to her delicate reserve?" asked Blackman, "Is she well?"

Gerald's look darkened. "She has been very ill," he said. "She is at her uncle's house, and intends soon to go abroad for her health."

"Indeed? And you will remain here?"

"I suppose so. I do not know. I do not take sufficient interest in the future to plan for a day ahead."



"But you are to be a famous musician," cried Frank. "I met Beckwith on my way uptown, and he buttonholed me to entreat me to ask you for your sonata for immediate publication, and anything else that you have on hand he will be glad to examine at once."

Maynard made a grimace. "Such is fame," he said, "Why is my music thought to be better to-day than it was a day or two ago? Is it not discouraging to an artist that no absolute standard exists by which the merit of his work can be determined? The man who can devise cheap tricks to catch the attention of the public is the genius of to-day."

"But we must please our public, however much we may inwardly deride its judgment, since we exist by its consent," said Rudolph. "This is your opportunity, Maynard. Do not deny that you have worked and waited for it, and that you rejoice at this fulfilment of your hopes. You already show the effects of success. It is only your great man who can afford to be a cynic."

Gerald laughed and his eyes shone with satisfaction. "I am glad of a chance that gives me a footing on the ladder," he said, "but I hope to climb it by my own merits. After all, our artistic conscience is our severest critic and most inexorable judge. What seems success to others is relative failure to ourselves."

"And our apparent success in life may cover an aching heart," said Rudolph. "Can you cap that with

another aphorism, Bumstead? It looks well to pose as a man of feeling. Indeed, I have concluded that the cultivation of sentimentality is the only refuge from *ennui*. I laughed at you once, you will remember, when I found you sitting up in bed, sipping a cup of tea and writing a sonnet. Now I envy you the visits of the Muse, and I am convinced that a fondness for tea not only eradicates a taste for *absinthe* but also implies a disposition which women of the better sort, our household divinities, love to minister unto. Cowper, you know, in the sufferings of hypochondria was consoled by his tea-kettle and the devoted female friends who presided over the brewing of the 'cup that cheers'; and Richardson, who was the first successful novelist, would not have escaped the sense of relative failure to which Maynard alludes—his conscience might have accused him of prolixity—if it had not been for the circle of feminine admirers to whom he read his pages while they all imbibed innumerable cups of tea. The lack of sentimentalism is the unacknowledged defect of our age; and the cause of it may be found in the fact that our tea-drinking is a profane thing. We put lemon in it. We take it at the unhallowed hour of five amid chattering crowds. We omit the fire-side scene, the one adorable companion of our thoughts, the sputtering blaze, the hissing urn;—and in consequence life is a bore. We take it too seriously. Its intensity palls upon us."

He rose as he concluded. "Remember me to your

wife, Maynard," he said as he took leave. "I shall hope to call upon her before she goes abroad."

"What an odd fellow he is," said Frank, "I am never at ease with him. I always imagine that he is laughing at me."

"So Beckwith entreated the privilege of publishing my music," said Gerald, recurring to the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Oh yes," answered Bumstead. "You must go and see him at once. He was in a genial mood."

"I have an engagement at ten," said Gerald, looking at his watch.

"Join me at lunch and we can talk it over," said his friend.

"I do not know," said Maynard hesitatingly. "A great deal depends on the interview I am looking forward to. Do not count on me for to-day."

"I shall see you to-night at the meeting of the club," said Bumstead. Gerald assented, and the friends parted.

## CHAPTER XVI.

At ten o'clock Gerald Maynard rang the bell at Mr. Vance's door, and was shown into the back parlor where the sunshine entered warmly through a southern window before which a tall rubber-plant in a tub erected its stiff shape and shining leaves. His heart beat fast as he heard Massey's footstep in the hall. She did not keep him waiting, but entered swiftly, gave him the tips of her fingers with an averted face, and sank as if exhausted into a large chair which she drew into the shadow, motioning him to a place opposite.

"Thank you for coming," she said, with polite formality, as if addressing an obliging business agent whose presence she had requested. "I wanted to see you very much. Of course you felt that it was necessary."

She spoke hurriedly, catching her breath with an effort, while she fastened her eyes with a sort of anxious scrutiny on Maynard's face. He did not fail to notice the absence of personal feeling in her manner. She looked at him with remote impartiality. He was struck by the pathetic pallor of her face, which was haggard and wan. She looked ill, and her hands trembled as she clasped them with nervous force.

"Massy, dear, you are ill, you have suffered by my fault. Forgive me. Can you forgive me?" he exclaimed.

She started and frowned slightly. "It is not a question of that," she said in a husky voice. "I am ill, yes; and very weak. You must let me speak without interruption."

She turned her face aside, and brushed her eyes hastily with her handkerchief.

"It is only that I am so weak," she explained in a faltering voice, repulsing him with an imperious gesture, as he made a motion to take her hand pityingly. "Of course we cannot part without an understanding. You probably would not care to ask for what I am ready and willing to grant. When I am gone I shall allow you, expect you, in fact, to obtain a divorce."

"Oh, Massey, how can you?" he cried. "I was not thinking of that. It had not entered my mind. I thought you loved me too well to treat me so cruelly."

She met his look with indignant eyes. "Cruel!" she exclaimed. Then she gave a little hysterical laugh.

"It is hardly in good taste for you to remind me that I loved you when it was with so little urging or none at all," she said. "You were entrapped into a marriage with me, it seems, through my uncle's mistaken anxiety for my happiness. After learning that I cannot blame you for anything. It is I who am to blame. I should have suspected your pretense of affection. Since I realize my folly, I am ready to

make you any amends in my power. I could not suffer more in one case than in the other; and your future must be considered." She paused, choked by a rising sob.

"Massey, you hurt me. I will accept no sacrifice from you," he exclaimed. "All I ask is your forgiveness, and that you will come back to me and be my dear little wife."

She colored indignantly. "What is your object in attempting to deceive me?" she asked. "Why should you not acknowledge to me your love for Miss Chapman? At present you are false to both of us."

"Can you not credit me with the power of repentance?" he asked. "Do you not take into account the depth of my gratitude? When I heard Blavatsky play my sonata I vowed the future of my life to you. Can we not forget the past and begin again with a truer understanding of ourselves and our duty to each other?"

Massey shook her head. "How can you dream of my forgetting?" she cried. "What woman would accept gratitude and duty in the place of love? You owe me nothing. Our marriage has been merely a terrible mistake for which you have been less to blame than I. I can never forget that you have kept a smiling face before me while you were suffering a despair which made death seem welcome. The torture that I have to bear is greater still, the shame that burns into the soul. You must now be free to live your life as if we had never met. The Church does not sanction

divorce, but you do not feel bound by its teachings, and the civil law will free you. You can plead my desertion, anything you choose. I will not defend myself. This is what I meant to tell you when I sent for you."

"I will not accept my freedom, and I will not release you, Massey," he replied. "Your uncle, of course, wishes it, and your aunt has never been reconciled to our marriage. They would like you to forget this unhappy episode in your life, for you are young and have the future before you. But I have learned that the chain of sympathy which binds us is stronger than any legal tie. In a moment of madness I gave way to the passion which impelled me to sacrifice everything, life itself, as a debt which I owed to my dearest friend. I could not hesitate in the payment of what seemed absolutely imperative. I was beside myself. I should have felt the claims of duty, and have been willing to bear the consequences of my actions. You have no cause to reproach yourself. I should thank you on my knees for your love and goodness. Do not stifle the feelings of your heart. Let me prove my gratitude by consecrating myself to you."

"You are speaking from impulse now," she replied. "Nothing has occurred to change the situation since you wrote to Miss Chapman that you could not endure the miseries of your position. I should respect you more if you were consistent and frank. I hoped that we could talk rationally, and decide upon the future as it would be best for both."

"It is you, then, who wish the divorce," he said, frowning.

"For you, not for me," she replied. "I am content to be bound with the tie which the Church declares to be indissoluble; but I wish you to be free. I can never recover from the shame of the thought that you married me out of pity, that all this while you have lived a lie. I can understand your despair and your wish to end your life. The suffering must have been too great to bear." She closed her eyes with a look of anguish.

"I am not consistent," he exclaimed. "I am a creature of impulse. My love for Reine was a latent, unsuspected thing. It was not the consuming passion which you imagine to have been always present in my consciousness. It came upon me suddenly as a convincing force when I found that she loved me. I half suspect that it was at the most an exaggerated form of gratitude. Perhaps I am not capable of a great passion. I feel now that it is you to whom I owe my heart and life. Reconcile the contradiction if you can."

"I shall not attempt to," said Massey, wearily. "It is useless to prolong this discussion. It does not seem possible to me that you can be capable of so strange an ignorance of the real feelings of your heart. I must believe that pity and generosity urge you now to deceive yourself. When I am gone you will soon forget that this has been anything but a dream from which you have awakened. You will realize then what your



true happiness demands, and you will remember that I shall never stand in the way of your possessing it. I shall always be interested in your success. I will ask you now to leave me."

She rose and held out a cold, trembling hand. Gerald drew her towards him and kissed her with fervent emotion. She submitted for a moment to the caress, then repulsing him with force she turned and escaped from the room.

"Remember that I do not give you up," he said, following her to the foot of the staircase and again possessing himself of her hand. "The marriage-tie is, as you say, indissoluble. You are mine in spite of all that can occur to separate us."

Massey leaned, panting with emotion, against the bronze Mercury that was poised upon the newel-post. Her beautiful eyes regarded her husband with sombre reproach.

"What excuse will you give later to Miss Chapman for this moment of madness?" she asked. "You are not sincere. My trust in you is at an end. All is over between us."

She hastily withdrew her hand and ran lightly up the stairs. He stood awhile where she had left him. Then he opened the outer door within voluntary caution, as if he were leaving a house of mourning, closed it with equal care, and descended the steps like one walking in a dream.

## CHAPTER XVII.

ALLEN GRANT was reading in his study in the evening when Gerald Maynard walked in upon him.

"I do not dare to offer myself as an organist at the coffee-house," he said. "I have separated from my wife, and although it is by Massey's choice, Miss Linton will not forgive me for it, I know. I cannot think of any distraction sufficient to drown my care; but I have come to propose that you go with me to a meeting of the *Fin de Siècle* club, that organization of congenial minds which is so unfortunate as to have incurred my Aunt Mercy's condemnation. I do not suppose you will find it interesting. I confess that it is often a bore, but, as I told you, I consider that you are responsible for me. I do not mean that you shall lose sight of me. I should like to give my conscience into your charge, as if I were a devout Romanist and you were my confessor. What a convenient arrangement that must be. No wonder the Church is powerful, since it derives its strength from the weakness of its members. I feel the need of an infallible guide."

"I cannot serve in that capacity," said Grant, who was gravely concerned by Gerald's news, "but I will go

with you to the club meeting in my proper character as your brother man, needing help and giving it where I can. I may enjoy the meeting. Young men are always interesting to me, though I confess that habit leads me to prefer those who wear overalls and workmen's blouses."

"Rudolph Blackman is the only member of our society who is anything of a swell," said Maynard. "Most of us are artists, musicians, and literary men who follow the fashion in clothes from afar. If we own a dress coat it is usually in pawn. The meeting to-night is at the house of Emil Franz who lives over a shoe-store in Eighth Avenue. His father, who owns the store, is a red-hot socialist who edits the *Bugle Call*, a free-thinking organ. His wife looks after the business, and Emil, the only son, plays the violin. He is a finished musician."

"I shall be glad to make his acquaintance," said Grant. "There is danger of becoming narrow if we work too long in one rut. You need not tell your friends that I am a minister. I go to listen, not to criticise."

"I hope they will not be very bad to-night," said Maynard. "It depends on the mood of the meeting, and the presence or absence of our best or worst members. There are some incorrigible grumblers to whom nothing is sacred. Others, like myself, worship the beautiful and dislike exaggerated theories. If Emil is in the mood to play for us we all become his

listeners. It is as it may chance. But there is always plenty of beer and a pipe apiece."

The Club was in session when the two arrived. The men sat about in comfortable chairs in Mrs. Franz's best parlor, smoking and drinking beer.

"I say, Franz, the attic in Brooklyn would be a better meeting-place for us," said one. "If I am called upon to exhort I like to be able to mount a table. Carpets and cushions and pictures are not necessary to the perception of severe truth. We are growing too luxurious. It tends to effeminacy."

"Our attic is monopolized by the printing presses of *Bugle-call*," said Franz, "and my father carries the key of the door in his pocket. My mother is proud that you should use her furniture. She would gladly sacrifice her tables in the cause."

"I hope it is not the sense of this meeting that luxury is an evil," said a tall man, a poet, who wore a velvet smoking-jacket. "Blackman should be here to combat such a heresy. I hope we know that life owes us all that we can get out of it. We are not subscribers to the *Bugle-call*."

"It would be well if we were," said a little hunchback, who was a wood-engraver of note. "We would then have an enthusiasm which is what we sadly lack."

"You would not know what to do with such an inconvenient possession," said the poet. "An enthusiasm for something outside of oneself and one's work,

which is what you mean, I suppose, would be a dead weight to carry. We pride ourselves on the integrity of our balance ; sensation weighed against reflection, passion subdued by self-interest, and the result a philosophical indifference which is the *summum bonum* we strive for, if we strive at all. There is nothing strenuous in our age. Fancy a Columbus or a Joan d'Arc among us to-day. We would find a shorter way to dispose of them than by the cruelty of neglect, or the martyrdom of the stake."

"I take exception to Shorthouse's remarks," said a little man who was sunk in the depths of a Turkish chair. "I take it that we endeavor to represent by our organization into this distinguished fraternity the innermost thought of our time, the closest apprehension of the *Zeit Geist* ; and I count it heresy for any one of us to sum up his creed in an epigrammatic form which denies the whole by excluding its essential part. I deny that either reflection or self-interest influence us greatly as restraints, or extinguish the vital manliness which acts and feels. I deny that our century ends in the decrepitude of age. Our men are still capable of the valor of an Oliver and the virtue of a Bayard, if they could be moved by a motive as strong as that of chivalry or religion."

"True, perhaps, but find me your motive," cried Shorthouse. "It is the lack of motive which I have indicated. We are agreed there."

"The enthusiasm of which I spoke will furnish

that motive," said the hunchback. "We are all agreed."

"Vivian cultivates the enthusiasm for humanity," said Emil Franz. "It is the fashionable substitute for religion. I suppose you have all read my article on *Immortality in Descent*. I assure you I was full of that sort of enthusiasm when I wrote that treatise, but I find that it fails when put to the test. I am conscious that personal and selfish motives have greater power to influence my conduct than the vague and impartial love for generations yet unborn."

"What we want is not a general, but a particular enthusiasm. Franz is right," said Vivian; "but we are here to glorify our age not to find fault with it. Does the true appreciation of the spirit of our times justify Shorthouse's criticism?"

Milburn, an artist with yellow locks, yawned vigorously.

"Let us discuss something interesting," he said. "There is not one of us who is a representative man, pose as we may for the character. We are too full of hobbies if not of enthusiasms. Our conclusions are not conclusive. We cannot see beyond our noses."

"Why should we expect anything of life?" said Maynard. "It is a poetic fiction alone that finds interest and charm in its sordid details. The glory and the freshness of a dream, fade with youth. Youth is the only good, and we are not conscious of it till it is gone."

After that, to attempt to delude oneself with enthusiasms is to be a Don Quixote self-deceived into mistaking inn-yards for castle courts, and frowsy servant girls for beautiful princesses."

"Hear this from the apostle of the beautiful," cried Milburn. "Bumstead would tell us that he has had a fit of indigestion. Frank is our most practical philosopher. Not the heart, but the stomach, is the source of evil, according to him, and all our misdeeds can be traced to a defective diet, or to the excesses of our ancestors in the matter of eating and drinking."

"I have only made more evident the value of our perception of beauty," said Gerald. "It is all that is left to us out of the ruins of our illusions."

"Why do you limit your survey to the closing years of this century?" asked Allen Grant. "You are young enough to look further ahead. It always vexes me to hear men call themselves *fin de siècle*, glorifying the virtues and vices of a dying age, as if it held the last word and nothing lay beyond. Why not be ready to welcome the new century that will soon be here?"

"*Le nouveau siècle*," said Shorthouse, "it is too vague a term. 'The king is dead. Long live the king.' We shall say that with the rest, no doubt, when the time comes. But while he lives, we worship the old sinner on the throne. Louis the Fourteenth, sinking into decrepitude at the close of his century, was a type of the life of it, though he lived on into the next. Ours is the same life re-enacted on a higher scale with the brutality

softened and the sensuality refined a little. The new century will probably be no greater an advance on ours."

"I like to imagine," said Grant, "that the new century will realize all our ideals and right all our wrongs. I like to believe that it will become the field of a new chivalry more religious than any in the past. You do not sufficiently recognize the deepening spirituality which is one of the striking features of the times. See how, both here and abroad, it has become a motive-spring of action among young and vigorous intellects. We live in a glorious age because it catches from the near future the dawning of the coming day."

A broad-shouldered German, who had puffed at his pipe in silence, here laid it down and squared himself in his chair with a scornful glance about the circle. Gerald looked at him with anxiety, for he disliked the sort of tirades in which he often indulged. Nothing was sacred enough to be safe from his caustic tongue and biting sarcasm, and he affected a style of speech purposely free from the restraints of prudence and decorum, as if to illustrate the immunity from law which he claimed for personal character.

"Play for us, Franz," urged Gerald in a whisper. "Do not let Rosenbaum speak. He is always outrageous when he has that twinkle in his eye."

"Presently," said Franz. "He threatened to say something disagreeable of one of our members. When he comes to that I will begin my music. By the way,



why do you stay, if you object to his style? Your friend would be bored ; better go at once."

Maynard's curiosity was aroused, and he felt no inclination to follow this advice. Rosenbaum began in a conversational tone, which grew in oratorical force as he became interested, an eloquent exposition of "the creed of negation." He ridiculed, in turn, the ideas of enthusiasm, chivalry, religion, and spirituality, adopting the manner of a lawyer who takes up his opponent's argument in order to demolish it. He had all the advantage of unscrupulous attack over conservative defence, and he used a quick wit and a good memory to supply him with telling points to amuse or confuse his hearers. He closed with a parody of Allen's prophecy of the future, in which he pictured society degenerating into anarchy, nations falling to pieces by their own weight, socialism triumphing on the ruins of the state, the family dissolved, the increasing facilities for divorce resulting in the substitution of free love for marriage, religion supplanted by a universal agnosticism.

"The result of all this will be the triumph of the individual," he continued. "In nature we see the operation of laws which ignore and crush the individual, counting only the species of value and preserving that at the expense of unheeded multitudes that go under in the struggle for existence. Man opposes himself to Nature and gains the victory. When the time comes that a man alone and unaided shall wield

the force of armies, the organization of the hirelings of war will cease. The tendency of the coming age will be not to organization but to disintegration. The force I mention is in its infancy. We play like children with explosives ; but the time will come when a man can carry in his pocket the power to lay New York or Paris in ruins at his feet. The last man will stand aloft above the shipwreck of a world. In the struggle for the absolute freedom of the individual a hecatomb of victims will be slain, but he who gains the highest point of untrammelled liberty will feel within himself the expanding consciousness of personal omnipotence. To be free is to be a god."

He paused, and Franz took up his violin and drew his bow across the strings. "Rosenbaum must stop here," he said in Gerald's ear. "I have heard that he means to conclude his speech by an absurd resolution of sympathy for you in your domestic infelicities to illustrate a tirade against marriage in general. It is abominable, but he stops at nothing."

He began an energetic waltz measure with which he had sometimes cut short a too heated argument or suppressed a tedious harangue. His violin was often conceded the power of a chairman's gavel. On this occasion Rosenbaum protested, shaking his fist at him.

"Restrain him, put him in a straight-jacket," he said, "I have not concluded. I claim liberty of speech, Mr. President. That is the last privilege an American citizen will relinquish."

Shorthouse, who was addressed, stole behind the fiddler and placed his long arms about him, holding him in a grasp from which there was no escape. Rosenbaum took possession of his bow, while Franz, panting and struggling, swore vigorously in German.

"Come," said Gerald to Allen. "Let us go."

When they were outside he threw back his head with a sigh. "It was disgusting," he said. "That German socialist should not be admitted among gentlemen. Franz warned me that he was preparing to say something insulting in regard to my domestic affairs. I should have strangled him if he had spoken Massey's name."

Grant look at him sympathetically.

"I am sorry they bored you," continued Gerald, with an effort at self-control. "If Vivian or Franz had declaimed it would have been different."

"We will go again to hear them," said Allen, and the friends parted.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Gerald reached his home he found a note beneath his door which Frank Bumstead had left there late in the afternoon.

"Do not go to the club to-night," he wrote, "Rosenbaum means to be disagreeable. Come to supper at my house, and I will take you to make your peace at the Chapmans'."

Gerald glanced at the clock. It was too late to accept the invitation. He sighed as he realized anew the desolation of his home. He had hardly entered the parlor before, with a premonitory tap upon the door, the cook and housemaid presented themselves, arrayed imposingly in their Sunday clothes and bonnets, while each held a satchel tightly grasped in her hand.

"We've been waiting for you to come in, sir, to give warning and leave. We've read all about you in the paper, and we're thinking it's no place here for respectable girls, now the mistress is gone and never coming back."

"Go," said Gerald angrily, "I prefer that you should."

"We'll send for our trunks in the morning," said Mary, "and you'll please give us the month's full

wages. We'll be out of a place and by no fault of our own."

Gerald flung the designated amount upon the table, and watched his late domestics pocket it and depart with severely dignified farewells. Then he flung himself into a chair and laughed aloud, leaning his head upon his hand. Growing conscious of the formidable solitude which had taken possession of what had been a cheerful home, he ceased his hollow laugh, and stared about him with a sigh.

The red roses still stood in the crystal bowl where Massey's fingers had placed them. They were only withered semblances of flowers, and the water had grown foul. He snatched them up, and flung them into the open grate, and emptied the water at the butler's sink, where Massey used to wash her daintiest pieces of cut-glass and porcelain with her own hands. He carelessly allowed the bowl to slip from his hold, and break at his feet. He was in a mood that found relief in wanton destruction. So must perish all memories of the past.

In Massey's boudoir her favorite violet perfume still lingered in the air. A glove lay on her dressing-table, shaped to the contour of her little hand. Gerald took it up and pressed it to his lips.

"Fool!" he murmured, frowning angrily at his image in the glass, and he flung himself upon a lounge, burying his head in the cushions in an agony of self-condemnation. Massey's looks, her tricks of voice and

laughter, her smile, her kiss, the touch of her hands seemed to him now, that he had lost them, the dearest things in life.

"She was mine, and I let her go," he groaned. "Oh, Massey, forgive me."

Scalding tears fell upon the satin cushion. He realized for the first time what Massey's grief must be, thrust so suddenly from the paradise of her love. He felt that his life was a miserable failure. He had been conscious of a strength proportionate to his needs, a judgment sufficient for life's problems, and an intellectual perception of truth and beauty beyond that of the unenlightened multitude. All had failed him. He had blundered hopelessly. The habit of egotism, the unconscious posing, as it were, before a soul-mirror, gave a fictitious quality to his emotions, and left him in doubt of his own heart. Did he love Reine, when, flattered by the naïve betrayal of her feelings, he had laid his life at her feet ; or was it friendship quickened by gratitude that took that form, deceiving him by an impulse that undermined his self-control as a tidal wave sweeps away a fisher's hut built upon the sand ? Did he love Massey now that he lay with his cheek upon her perfumed glove idealizing, every tender memory of the past until it shone with that purple light which is the glory of the soul ?—loving both he was false to both ; loving neither he was false to himself. As he grovelled beneath accusing thoughts, a tender minor chord arose within his fancy, stealing out of the dim

halls of the mind which are never vexed by the ebb and flow of passion, and it grew, enriching itself with added melodies till he almost held his breath to listen.

He sprang up and seized his portfolio to jot down and elaborate the theme thus begun. He ran to the piano, to aid the work of his mind by the work of his fingers. It was the first time since his fatal relinquishment of his ambition that the inspiration had come to him. The depth of his grief had enriched his music. There was a new tone underlying its melodies. The accustomed energy of composition awoke within him. He felt that glow of artistic ardor that counts nothing too sacred to feed its fire ; and was aware of a pen-sive self-congratulation that the soul-struggle through which he had passed should become thus transmuted into material for his art.

A ring at the outer door roused him from his abstraction. Mr. Vance entered at his invitation.

"Pardon my intrusion at so late an hour," he said stiffly. "I saw the light in your windows and heard your music, or I should not have ventured to disturb you."

"I am at your service at any time," said Gerald, questioning him with an anxious look. "Is Massey ill?"

"No. She is much better. We sail on Wednesday for Hamburg. My wife sent me to inform you that you need put yourself to no trouble concerning the disposition of Massey's possessions. She will take

nothing but her clothes, and my wife will send her maid to pack her trunks. I wish to say to you also that I will leave this apartment and its furniture in your hands. Use it or sublet, it as you choose, for the term of the lease. Massey wishes you to keep the wedding-presents. She desires no reminder of the past."

Gerald's look darkened. "I share her feeling," he said. "It is torture for me to be here. I thank you for your intended kindness, but what I shall do will be to turn my back upon the place, lock the door, and leave it undisturbed for two years to come."

"As you please," said Mr. Vance resignedly, though he felt a business man's impatience of so unpractical a decision. "I have nothing further to say except to wish you good-evening."

"Good-bye," said Gerald hoarsely. "I may see you when the steamer sails."

"Pray do not come," said Mr. Vance decidedly. "You must be aware that Massey's composure is hard won. She can live only by a studied forgetfulness of her sorrows, of which you are a living reminder. I cannot understand why you should wish to trouble her further. The only kindness you can show her now is by obliterating yourself from her memory and never crossing her path again."

When Gerald was alone he returned to his interrupted composition ; but he could not renew the broken spell. A deadly lethargy had replaced the freedom of



inspiration. He tossed aside the portfolio, and sat motionless for hours with his head upon his hands, a victim of despair.

On the following Thursday the morning's mail brought Maynard two letters. One was from Mrs. Chapman, and he read it with anxiety.

"Dear Mr. Maynard," she wrote. "I learn from Mr. Bumstead that you are intending to call upon us to make your peace, as he says, for what has passed. This is impossible. I, for one, can never forgive you for my daughter's suffering, and for the injury you have done her in the opinion of people who judge everything by its outward appearance. Harsh as it may seem, I must absolutely forbid your calling at our house. Reine's future must be considered."

The other letter contained a few lines from Reine, written in such agitation that he had not recognized the hand. "Do not come to our house," she wrote. "My mother will not receive you. I will be at Mrs. Bumstead's Thursday evening at five o'clock."

At five o'clock Maynard entered Mrs. Bumstead's parlor. He found the tea-table, as usual at this hour, set with a dainty service of Dresden china and drawn forward beside a blazing wood fire where a kettle bubbled merrily on a crane. Mrs. Bumstead came forward to receive him at the door. She was a stout woman, who wore by preference a black satin gown which fitted her broad shoulders and massive bust without a crease. A bow of black lace and lilac ribbons sur-

mounted her white hair, and her hands were encased in black lace mitts. No representations of her favorite son, whom she idolized and deferred to in most matters, could shake her faith in the elegance of this costume.

She greeted Gerald warmly. "Reine is here," she added in a hoarse whisper. "It is perfectly proper that you should meet her, when I am with her to matronize you both. Frank says so, and I am sure he is right."

Reine smiled at Gerald, and gave him her hand without rising from the large easy-chair in which her slight figure was sunk, as if glad of the support afforded by its cushions. She was ghastly pale, and there were dark circles about her eyes.

"I am so glad to see you once again," she said in a tone fervent with meaning.

Mrs. Bumstead, finding the fire too warm, had taken her cup of tea and retreated into the adjoining room, separated only by a bamboo portière, and Frank stood near his mother, having greeted Gerald with a wave of the hand. The two by the fire were enabled to converse without interruption.

"You are too good to me,—better than I deserve," said Gerald, looking fondly at her pallid face. "You have suffered, as all my best friends have. What can I do to repair my fault?"

"It is I who am chiefly to blame," she answered. "My folly urged you to all that you have done. I

can never forgive myself for allowing you to see what I should have died rather than betray."

She blushed painfully, and tears rose to her eyes. Gerald felt a sudden resolution born of a pitying wish to lift the weight of humiliation which seemed to crush her as she spoke.

"Massey has offered me my freedom," he said. "She urges me to secure a divorce. If I do this, will you marry me, Reine?"

Reine's golden head was inclined like a drooping flower; and the tears which filled her eyes fell hotly upon her folded hands.

"You humiliate me," she said in a choking voice. "I deserve it, but it hurts, Gerald. How can you believe that my affection for you is so basely selfish as to demand the sacrifice of your self-respect? If I love you, I love you at your best and noblest. If I am here to-day in open opposition to my mother's wishes, it is not to allow you to forget the duty which you owe to your innocent wife. It is only because I felt guilty of having spoiled your life that I wished to offer you some reparation. I did not mean to incur a deeper guilt."

"Reine, Reine," cried Gerald. "Do not be severe with me. I am a desperate man. I cannot stop to weigh my words. All is over between Massey and me. I realized that as I stood upon the pier and watched the steamer out to sea. Decide as you please. I am tired of debating right and wrong. I only know that if you desert me I shall go to the dogs."

"I will not desert you," said Reine, smiling tenderly upon him through her tears. "I wanted to tell you that to-day. We need not give up the friendship that has been so dear to us unless we are so weak as to renounce our old ideals and our belief in each other."

Gerald's smile responded to hers. "That is what I long for," he said, "to have you once more my dearest friend and highest inspiration. But it is not possible, Reine," he added, with a quick change of tone. "The world is so cruel, and it would misunderstand us. Your mother is right. We must not meet often. I must learn to do without you."

The utter dejection of his look cut Reine to the heart.

"Why should we concern ourselves with the base suspicions of petty gossips?" she asked. "I am willing to defy them."

He shook his head, but he spoke more cheerfully. "You are so good to me that I must try and make no unreasonable demands upon your kindness, but it encourages me to know that some one is still interested in me. You have set a pretty tune humming in my head, a tune of which I had lost the ending. I have found it again."

"You will be a great musician," said Reine with kindling eyes.

"And you will help me to it," he rejoined. He took her hand and smiled into her eyes with grateful affection. "Dear Reine," he said, moved by the look he met there.

"Dear Gerald," she said resolutely, and she did not repulse him when, moved by a sudden impulse, he bent and kissed her as a brother might.

Frank Bumstead, coming forward, saw Reine sitting upright in her chair with a pale face and shining eyes, while Gerald, with his old easy animation, was pouring her a cup of tea and describing an interview with Beckwith the publisher.

"I am to dictate my own terms," he said. "The czar of all the half-Russias (bindings, you know) is almost ready to kneel at my feet. I mean to make the most of it."

Mrs. Bumstead followed her son, and sank into her rocking-chair by the fire with a sigh of relief.

"You have made it up with Reine, Gerald, I see," she said. "You look like yourself once more. There is nothing better than a chance for a quiet talk with a friend to reconcile matters. I believe myself in sincerity and frankness. Mrs. Chapman makes a mistake in trying to keep you apart. If she knew her daughter as well as I do she would know she might be trusted anywhere. Frank thinks Reine is as perfect as any one can be, and I guess he is right."

Frank looked up with a queer grimace and a fleeting blush.

"I do not know that I have ever told Reine my serious opinion of her," he said. "But this is as it should be. We are united again in that trinity of friendship which has been to me, at least, the dearest thing in life."

## CHAPTER XIX.

RUDOLPH BLACKMAN was escorting a party of friends lately arrived from England through one of the picture galleries of New York. The two young ladies turned their eyes more often towards their conductor than in the direction of the paintings, which their mother, as in duty bound, examined with a pretence of interest made more imposing by the co-operation of a lorgnette and catalogue frequently applied and consulted.

"I cannot say that I like your modern paintings," said Mrs. Hartley. "We see so many old masters abroad, it quite spoils our taste for anything else. Now, that is a pretty thing."

She pointed to a picture, entered in the catalogue as *A Lady with a Rose*, to which her attention had been attracted by the number of people who had gathered in front of it. Her sudden recognition of its merits was due to an instinctive participation in the popular interest which it excited.

"Yes, that is good," said Rudolph. "You know Waller's lyric 'Go, lovely Rose,'—I believe that was the inspiration of the work."

Mrs. Hartley stared. She had never heard of Waller,

and she considered it bad form in her escort to make allusions implying a reserve fund of encyclopedic information ; but she consoled herself by the quick reflection that America was full of poets whose names were unknown in London. Chicago, she believed, was a hot-bed of poetry as well as of socialism.

"Is it the popularity of the poet which gives the painting its vogue?" she asked in a slightly supercilious tone.

"Rather, if you choose, the popularity of the artist," answered Rudolph smiling. "I can point Miss Chapman out to you, that tall young lady with auburn hair who wears a tailor-made gown and who is talking to that little man in gray."

"Oh, that is Mr. Maynard, is it not?" cried Amelia Hartley vivaciously. "You know, mamma, the musician who played at Mrs. Houghton's. We went there the day after we landed, don't you know? And of course you remember the song, 'Go, lovely Rose.' He has lately set it to music. Miss Houghton showed me a copy which he had presented to her. He is all the rage, quite a celebrity is he not, Mr. Blackman?"

"You have so many celebrities in America," said Mrs. Hartley wearily. "It is easy to attain distinction, I fancy, when every one starts on the same level. At home one must have a name and a family or be a great genius in order to be talked about."

The Misses Hartley had been staring at the surprising conjunction of an artist and a composer both young

and handsome, well dressed and absorbed in each other.

"They look like lovers," said Julia Hartley with a giggle.

"Julia, what a singular remark," exclaimed her mother with grave severity, beckoning her daughter closer within the shelter of the maternal wing.


"Engaged people, I mean," said Julia defiantly, as she took her place at her mother's side.

"You should never make audible comments on people in a place like this," added Mrs. Hartley in an aside, "especially when you know nothing about them. Mr. Maynard is a married man who is separated from his wife; and I have heard of this Miss Chapman. She is——" the remainder of the sentence was whispered in Julia's ear.

"Oh, mamma!" cried the girl, blushing violently. Rudolph stood with his eyes fastened on the picture. Amelia surveyed her mother and sister with uneasy curiosity.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, jerking her sister's sleeve.

"It is unusual for so young an artist to do such good work," remarked Rudolph. "Miss Chapman is quite the lion of the hour, although, as Miss Hartley remarks, my friend, Mr. Maynard, shares her fame as he does her friendship. He has awakened to find himself famous, since the publication of his new opera *The Musketeer*. You notice that lady in black who





hovers like a shadow at Miss Chapman's side. That is her mother whom I call the Perpetual Chaperone. Her life is devoted to that one object. Miss Chapman, as is but natural, claims the large liberty of an artist and an American girl, and is careless of appearances while conscious of absolute rectitude of life. That is often the case with our American women when they are not society women. With them the statement might sometimes be reversed. Mrs. Chapman represents conventional propriety on its guard and ready with a challenge. She is determined that no one shall have a right to criticise her daughter. She has succeeded very well."

"Oh," said Mrs. Hartley, making mental comments upon this speech.

Mrs. Houghton arrived at this juncture, and offered the ladies a seat in her carriage as far as their hotel. She lingered to say to Rudolph, "You have never yet given the ball you talked about a year and a half ago. I promised to matronize it for you, but you did not value my kindness sufficiently to make use of it. Now is your time to do it. The Hartleys are enormously rich; landed estate, no sons, and no encumbrances. Julia is very pretty. Really, Rudolph, it is time that you should 'range yourself.'"

"I will think of it," he answered, "and I will give the ball. Thank you for reminding me."

Reine had stood apart with Gerald and her mother, enjoying the sight which they had come to observe, the first

public exhibition of one of her pictures which had been purchased to complete the collection of contemporaneous American artists, having first been in the hands of an amateur collector, who had sold it at a great advance. She was radiant with a double triumph, for at the same time with the exhibition of her picture, *The Musketeer* was being prepared for the first performance, which was to be given to the public the following week.

A little group of friends gradually collected about the two successful artists. Frank Bumstead was among them, and Mrs. Grayling and her cousin, Mr. Berkeley, who had become Gerald's most enthusiastic patron. Rudolph Blackman had already given to Reine his congratulations and a well-worded criticism on her work. He now approached and drew Frank Bumstead aside, on pretence of asking news concerning the last rehearsal of *The Musketeer*.

When they were at a distance he said, "It is a pity that a woman can never sink her personal identity in her artistic career. If Miss Chapman had overheard a criticism upon her character made by a woman a few moments ago, it would embitter the pleasure of every flattering thing said about her work;" and he told Frank the whispered comment which he had overheard.

Bumstead gave him a look of horrified incredulity. "Impossible!" he said. "No one could be so base."

"Oh, it is by no means the first time I have heard it," said Rudolph. "The circumstances only made it different. The lady who spoke is a foreigner without

personal bias. She repeats the gossip of the society in which she has been introduced. That circle, unfortunately, dictates the social creed to other circles which hinge upon it, and imitate its tone. I have, on several occasions, constituted myself Miss Chapman's champion, as I did at this time, with very little result."

"It is maddening," cried Bumstead.

"It is such a needless sacrifice," said Rudolph. "Gerald has no right to demand a friendship so self-forgetful that it lays itself open to misinterpretation."

Bumstead returned to the group where Reine stood talking merrily, while Gerald, still at her side, was listening and laughing. Bumstead paced about the edge of the circle like an angry lion dragging a chain, until he succeeded at last in drawing Mrs. Chapman to one side.

"Let us go home," he said. "Does it not seem to you that our party is a little conspicuous?"

A hint to Reine's anxious mother was enough. Mrs. Grayling, however, cut short her leave-takings with an invitation to the whole party to dine at her house and go over the score of *The Musketeer*. This was a welcome idea to those most interested, and although Mrs. Chapman hesitated she was forced to accept with the rest.

Mrs. Grayling's parlors had not been decidedly improved in their decorations, although Gerald's ridicule had succeeded in banishing the wonderful stuffed cat, and a new grand piano replaced the table loaded with

albums. It does not often happen that one lives to be nearly forty without a suspicion of one's most decided intellectual bent. Mrs. Grayling, however, had waited until now to discover a consuming zeal for music, and an eager wish to patronize its votaries. She had succeeded, with infinite pains, in gathering about her at a weekly reunion a number of people known to be musical; and for their pleasure she spared neither trouble nor expense to secure the latest novelty among the floating population of performers who may be fêted and lionized, and who often furnished really excellent music at her impromptu concerts. Startling contrasts and picturesque effects were not wanting to supply variety, for, with admirable catholicity of taste, she gave as warm a welcome to a crippled German who played the zither as to a devout disciple of Wagner; and was always ready to accord a leading place on the programme to her cousin, Mr. Berkeley, who played the flute.

It was Gerald Maynard's willingness to accompany his flute which won Mr. Berkeley's heart, and gained the young composer the *Mecænas* whose influence had secured a theatre and a manager for his new opera. The debt of gratitude seemed henceforth to weigh heavily on Maynard's side; but Mr. Berkeley had a lively sense of what it must be to listen with no evidence of tortured sensibilities to the too aspiring melodies in which he poured forth his soul. He was aware that his performance lacked force, flexibility, and often correct-

ness. The silver flute would wheeze and shriek when the performer was full of high intentions, and it would die to a wavering sigh when its owner's heart was thrilled with a rapture which he longed to communicate to the mind of the hearer. Maynard's willingness to overlook the frequent gap between the wish and the deed made Mr. Berkeley his friend ; and the graceful courtesy which the young musician showed him in composing a *capriccio* for flute and piano which was published and dedicated to him—his name appearing in beautiful German type upon the cover—set a seal to this friendship which gave it an undoubted value.

Mr. Berkeley was a widower, lately disappointed in love. He had an income larger than he could conveniently spend. It pleased him to lavish this surplus wealth in securing Maynard's fame, and incidentally his own recognition as a judge and patron of music.

It was not by chance, therefore, that Mr. Berkeley sat at the foot of the table at Mrs. Grayling's dinner which was to celebrate in an informal way the coming triumph, while Gerald sat at his right hand, and listened with cheerful attention to his remarks. Mrs. Chapman and Reine, Frank Bumstead and Emil Franz completed the party. *The Musketeer* was the sole subject of conversation.

"I stopped in at the box-office on my way up town," said Mr. Berkeley. "Everything is selling well. The proscenium boxes are all engaged. There was only one remaining, of course, after Mr. Blackman took the

lower one on the left, and I engaged the one over it, and Mr. Bumstead took the one opposite mine for you and your party. The other, the lower one on the right, was spoken for from the time the box-office opened for the sale on Monday. It was engaged by a German baron who is making a tour of this country with his wife and mother, I believe. I heard of him at the club, but I have forgotten his name. He is wealthy, I imagine. He offered any price necessary to secure it."

"Then we shall present an imposing appearance at any rate," said Maynard. "You must order a new dress, Reine, if you are to outshine a baroness. I shall withdraw into the shadow, but you must be seen and recognized as my Muse."

Reine blushed faintly, and Mrs. Chapman and Bumstead, moved by an instinctive sympathy, exchanged uneasy glances.

"I shall sit directly opposite to you," said Mrs. Grayling, "and I can see just what impression you make upon the large and enthusiastic audience. Of course they will call Gerald before the curtain. He will be deafened with applause and suffocated by bouquets. By the way, Cousin Robert, I hope you have left unlimited orders at the florist's."

Maynard laughed.

"Mr. Blackman has been before me," said Mr. Berkeley. "He has even gone further by arranging an organized system of *claqueurs*, hiring them, paying for their seats, and distributing them through the house."

Reine looked distressed. "You surely did not consent to this, Gerald," she said.

"Blackman did not wait for my consent," he answered. "He meant it all for the best. We shall be grateful enough for applause when we look about upon a handful of people and realize that the first night makes or mars the future of the piece."

"You are affectedly modest," said Mr. Berkeley. "I tell you the sales are encouraging, extremely so. Mr. Blackman is very sanguine. He tells me there will not be a seat left vacant by Wednesday night."

"Mr. Blackman should be with us this evening," said Mrs. Grayling. "He is a true friend. What an interest he has shown. He throws himself with such enthusiasm into all that he undertakes."

After dinner Maynard, Franz and Mr. Berkeley played the overture which Gerald had adapted as a trio for flute, violin and piano. Reine and Mrs. Grayling listened with unwearied pleasure. Frank Bumstead drew Mrs. Chapman to the remote end of the adjoining room.

"I want to speak to you," he said. "I want to ask your consent to marry Reine, and your influence to urge her to accept me."

Mrs. Chapman's face shone with sudden joy.

"Oh, Frank!" she exclaimed, giving him her hand. "It is the dearest wish of my heart."

"Do you not understand how necessary it is that she

should have a protector?" he said. "People gossip about her. They say unkind things."

"Am I not conscious of it?" she exclaimed. "Have I not endured torments all this while? Frank, you are an angel."

"Will she have me? Can she be persuaded?" he asked.

"It must be. It shall be. We will find a way," she answered. "I will think it over and tell you how."

"I have always loved her," said Frank modestly, "but I did not dare to make a claim upon her affection. Gerald was always first with us both."

"It should not be so," she replied. "He is selfish and short-sighted. He is quite incapable of your generous magnanimity."

Frank looked distressed. "He is a dear fellow," he said. "I would never oppose my wishes to his ; but Reine must not be sacrificed."

"You are right. Gerald would sacrifice any woman to his intense self-love."

"You are unkind to him," said Frank.

"I almost hate him," said Mrs. Chapman, with soft vehemence. "For a year and a half he has stood between me and my child. Her life has been one long disobedience. I have never retracted my refusal to receive him at my house ; yet Reine invites him there in open defiance of my wishes. She is with him constantly ; and, to give an air of propriety to it, I must go everywhere with them. I must smile and talk when



I am angry and hurt. And the excuse my undutiful daughter gives for her conduct is the plea that she was the cause of Gerald's rupture with his wife, and that therefore she must console him by a devoted, disinterested friendship. She maintains that his is a nature which can only exist when fed by sympathy and kindness, that if left to despair he would end his life as he once threatened, or sink into a state of apathy which could produce no great work. She has purchased his success in this way at the expense of my happiness and of her own best interests."

Seeing the concern in Frank's face, Mrs. Chapman feared that she had said too much to the discredit of the object of his affections.

"You will save us, Frank," she added. "You know how really good and noble Reine is. If she could marry a man who deserved her respect and affection, her friendship for Gerald would soon become a secondary matter."

"Will you help me?" he asked.

"Can you doubt it?" she exclaimed fervently.

Reine wondered that her mother was so cheerful and light-hearted for many days. Her pleasure in Gerald's success was augmented by this fact, which she did not in any way connect with the frequency of Frank Bumstead's visits.

## CHAPTER XX.

On the long-expected day when *The Musketeer* was to be performed, Bumstead called to escort the ladies on the tedious trip from their remote quarter of Brooklyn to the uptown theatre in New York which was the centre of their thoughts. Maynard was to join them in their box at the theatre.

"I could not be in a more joyful state of suspense," said Reine to Frank, as she followed him through the crowd upon the ferry-boat. "If this is a great success, it will be the happiest day of my life."

Frank's cheerful face took on a shade of dejection. Reine looked at him in surprise.

"You fear it may prove a failure?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, it will succeed, no doubt," he answered. Mrs. Chapman had purposely allowed herself to be separated by the crowd, being sure that she could easily rejoin them on the pier. Reine took Frank's arm as the ferry-boat landed, bracing herself with his assistance against the shock of its encounter with the pier, and the eager pressure of the hurrying multitude behind them.

"Will you marry me, Reine?" Frank whispered

in her ear as the chains rattled on the windlass and the gates swung open. He held her hand pressed firmly against his side, and led her forward, guiding her steps carefully upon the wharf, where they stood and waited beneath an electric lamp for Mrs. Chapman who signalled to them from the distance.

"Frank!" cried Reine.

"I love you. I have always loved you," he said. "You must marry me. It is the only thing to do."

"What do you mean?" she asked, with quick suspicion.

"I cannot live without you," he replied, "and my mother urges me to marry. We will be old some day."

"And my mother desires it?" said Reine.

"Of course. Why not?" he said. "Wait, Reine, you shall not refuse me. Wait till the opera is over. If it succeeds I am sure you will say yes."

Reine shook her head with compressed lips and a contracted brow. Mrs. Chapman hurried to them, panting.

"Such a crowd," she said cheerfully. "I thought I should never get to the end of it. Well, we are all right now."

Reine looked anxiously at her companions, detecting a certain understanding between them.

"I am afraid we shall be late," she said nervously, hastening on a little in advance of the others.

The — Theatre was crowded to its utmost capacity. This satisfactory fact was ascertained at a glance. Reine's spirits rose as she took her seat in the box

where Gerald awaited her, and greeted her with a smile and a hand-clasp of silent sympathy. "We shall succeed," he said.

Mrs. Chapman, confused by the lights and the consciousness of having become a mark for observation, seated herself beside her daughter, and cast timid glances into the body of the house.

"Mrs. Grayling is bowing to us from the opposite box," said Reine, divesting herself of her opera cloak.

"Does she not look pretty in evening dress?" whispered Mrs. Chapman to Frank.

"Who?" asked Maynard. "The fair widow?"

"No, Reine," answered Mrs. Chapman blushing.

"Oh, that of course," said Maynard emphatically.

"There is Blackman beckoning to me. Let him come here if he has something to say. I have been behind the scenes. You will be delighted with the *mise en scène*. The manager has been generous. So, I suspect, has Mr. Berkeley. I hope and pray the *entr'actes* will not be too long. The prima-donna has a most unbecoming costume of pale green, which would make her look sallow if it were not for the rouge. It does not suit her eyes and hair. Let us hope she will change it later on."

He was in gay spirits, and chatted incessantly, leaning on Reine's chair.

"Look at those English women with Blackman yonder," he said. "They have not taken their eyes off of you, Reine, since you came in. It always seems to

me to be a piece of cool impertinence to level an opera-glass persistently at a person's face. A lorgnette, too, gives one an unpleasant impression of being stared out of countenance. The youngest girl is quite pretty. I hear that Blackman is to marry her, but I do not believe it. Why does he beckon me to come to him? I have no wish to be introduced to the lorgnette and opera-glass. Oh, there is Allen Grant in the parquet. Good fellow! How kind of him to come. In moments of success one learns to appreciate a real friend as well as in a time of adversity. Alice Linton must be here somewhere. She promised to come, and I sent her a couple of tickets, but I cannot remember where her seat was. Besides, from this point of view it is impossible to distinguish. I would rather be on the stage for a view of the house."

"You will be there later," said Bumstead. "They will call you before the curtain."

"Oh, I hope not. I should be paralyzed with stage fright."

"When you are threatened with it, look at me," said Reine. "I will save you from it by an encouraging smile which will recall to you the fact that it is the proudest moment of your life."

"Thank you," he responded fervently.

The curtain rose, and the occupants of the box had no eyes or thoughts for the audience except to measure the success of the performance by a swift glance now and then about the silent house, or to give a delighted

smile as a recognition of a timely burst of applause. Reine wondered if the tale of Blackman's hired *claqueurs* were one of the many romances connected with his name, but she could not believe that anything less than genuine enthusiasm dictated the spontaneous and universal thunder which greeted the close of the first act.

Maynard was pale with excitement. "I wish it were over," he said. "It is well done, but it does not come up to my expectations. Why does the prima-donna ogle the house when she should be thinking of her part? Is it my fault or hers that it does not possess her?"

"I wish I were a famous singer instead of an indifferent artist," said Reine, with glowing cheeks. "I would take the part and throw my soul into it."

Gerald gave her a look of eloquent gratitude.

"Sit back a little, Reine," cried Mrs. Chapman. "It is well that Gerald should be conspicuous, but it is not necessary for you."

Reine shoved her chair back, looking at her mother with an expression of dignified reproach.

"Good Heavens! I do not wish to be conspicuous," said Maynard, retreating into the background. "I feel as if I should have to leave before the next act is half-way over. The chorus is a very difficult one. They are sure to make false notes. It will probably be hissed."

This dismal prediction was not verified. The en-

thusiasm of the audience and the confidence of the performers grew as the piece proceeded.

"I should not think it was a first night," said Bumstead. "All goes so smoothly."

Mr. Berkeley left his place and came to offer his congratulations to Gerald before the end.

"We have triumphed, my dear boy," he exclaimed, pressing his hand. "Your future is assured."

"And I owe it all to you!"

"Not at all. I have helped you to earlier recognition, that is all. Mrs. Grayling is delighted. She insists that we shall all meet again at her house, disregarding the lateness of the hour. It is once in a lifetime, she says."

At the close of the last act, the performers, laden with floral tributes, made their bows before the curtain and retired, smiling their acknowledgments. The composer was called for by shrill cries of "Maynard!" and greeted, when he appeared, by waving handkerchiefs, and the continued clapping of hands.

As he stood facing the audience, collected to do him honor, a sudden realization of the sweetness of success possessed him. He felt no fear as he swept the circle with a glance, but remembering Reine's words he was about to raise his eyes to her, when his look stopped, arrested by a group of persons in the box on the right of the stage, and directly beneath the one which he had occupied during the evening. He trembled and grew pale. He forgot the audience, the time, and place,

concentrating his being in a stare of wondering observation.

Massey sat in the centre of the box, with her beautiful head turned towards the stage and her smiling look fixed upon him. Her dress of delicate brocade was cut with a low corsage, and diamonds sparkled on her neck and in her hair. The radiant loveliness of youth, conscious of itself, and rejoicing in the knowledge, was subdued by a shade of tender feeling in the eyes and about the mouth, which might give at times a suggestion of melancholy to the perfect face.

It was only for an instant that she met Maynard's gaze ; then she broke the spell which held him by turning, with a smile, to address her companion in the box, an elderly lady, who was dressed in black velvet, and blazing with diamonds, while her hands, encased in tight gloves, held a vinaigrette and an enormous feather fan, which she waved before her face while she whispered to Massey.

Maynard then noticed that Mrs. Vance and her husband sat together in the background, and that just behind Massey's chair, half hidden by the curtain, stood a tall young officer in a uniform which displayed to advantage a handsome figure, and a half-dozen decorations which shone upon his breast. He was bending slightly forward and listening to Massey's words with a look of eager attention.

Maynard hastened from the stage while the audience were still applauding his appearance. In the cor-



ridor which led to the boxes, Rudolph Blackman encountered him and seized him by the arm.

"You looked like an amateur Hamlet in the ghost scene," said Rudolph. "Did you not know that Massey was here with Baron von Kramer and his mother?"

Maynard shook his head.

"She must have wished to give us all a surprise," continued Rudolph, "for the papers announced the arrival only of the baron and baroness, and a party of friends. I tried to make you come to my box, where you could see her without being seen. I thought you might like to strengthen your position by observations taken from that point of view. They say that she has returned to America in order to secure a divorce, which shall enable her to marry the baron. His family are Lutherans, and no religious scruples will stand in the way."

Rudolph looked keenly at his friend as he spoke, and noticed the angry color which rose to his forehead as he listened with an averted face.

"I wish that people would not be so ready with injurious gossip," he said.

"It is very likely to be true," said Rudolph. "The baron and his mother have had no eyes or ears except for her. Their judgment of your opera would not be conclusive. I do not believe they have heard a note. What a lovely creature she is! I always admired her greatly, but when I knew her she was only a pretty girl. She is now a glorious woman, capable of inspir-

ing a *grande passion* in the heart of a worldly Philistine of thirty-five,—myself for instance. I have been conscious all the evening of an insane desire to pitch that well-groomed, smirking German over the railing and to take his place at her side. It occurs to me that my giving this confidence to you, considering the circumstances, may seem equally insane. It is a tribute, however, to the impartial neutrality of the artistic nature, which is so evident in you that I feel like addressing you, not as an ordinary man who may be disturbed by affairs of the heart and their consequences, but rather as a priest dedicated solely to the worship of the Muse of Song. Is her name Calliope or Reine?"

Maynard withdrew himself abruptly from Rudolph's detaining grasp. "I forbid you to speak in this way about my wife," he said, angrily.

"You have flung her aside like a cast-off glove at the pleasure of your egotistical caprice," cried Rudolph with flashing eyes. "What right have you to dictate the terms on which other men shall stand with her?"

Maynard staggered back and leaned against the wall as if these words had wounded him like the blow of a knife. Rudolph turned on his heel and left him with a mocking laugh.

Maynard rejoined his party at the entrance to their box. Mrs. Grayling and her cousin were there, and laughter and the chatter of mutual congratulations made a cheerful hubbub which rose in volume as he appeared.

"‘See the conquering hero comes,’" cried Mrs. Grayling. "I have a laurel wreath waiting for you at home. You must all come to my house. We will have a glass of champagne, only a thimbleful for the ladies, Mrs Chapman, just enough to drink long life to Mr. Maynard, and a hundred nights to *The Musketeer*."

"I am sorry," said Maynard, "but I am not equal to anything more. I have a wretched headache. The excitement, I suppose, avenges itself."

Mrs. Chapman also declined for herself and her daughter; and after Mrs. Grayling had sounded the note of her regret with much repetition, the party broke up, Maynard being the first to leave.

"I understand what it means," said Mrs. Grayling, when he was out of sight. "I suppose up here you did not see ‘the cynosure of neighboring eyes’ who was in the box below." She glanced at Reine as she spoke. "It was Massey herself in flesh and blood, and with a real live German baron for her devoted attendant," she continued. "She looked as lovely as a picture. Of course it was odd, don't you know, her coming to-night, and Gerald stared at her from the stage as if he saw a ghost. Every one noticed it. It was a charming, sensational little scene which I suppose will never be repeated at any other performance of *The Musketeer*."

Reine was so silent and abstracted during the way home that Bumstead did not dare to urge her for the answer to his question, which he was eager now to defer to a more auspicious season.

"It was a great success," said Mrs. Chapman, and Frank assented.

"How strange it is that our hopes are never entirely fulfilled," thought Reine. "It has been a great success and yet this is not the happiest day of my life."

## CHAPTER XXI.

Mrs. VANCE and Baroness von Kramer sat together in confidential talk in the former's boudoir, the windows of which overlooked the avenue. From this situation they had lately seen the baron depart in a cab for the railway station. The faces of both ladies showed traces of tears. The baroness, seated in an American rocking-chair, swayed heavily back and forth, as if finding relief in the unusual motion.

"My dear Adelaide," said Mrs. Vance, "you must not blame me. My wishes have no weight with Massey. I was willing to trust everything to time and to Oscar's influence, if once they should be thrown sufficiently in each other's society. His imprudence precipitated the crisis too soon."

"If it had not been for your decided representations we should never have come to America," said the baroness. "Of course Oscar could not say to your daughter, 'Is it true that you will soon be divorced?' He has too much delicacy; but you gave me distinctly to understand that this would be the case."

"I told you my hopes," said Mrs. Vance uneasily.

"If they are bitterly disappointed you should not blame me."

"It was a fatal mistake for Oscar to engage a box at the theatre to see the opera of the man who stands in the way of his happiness," said the baroness; "but my son's generosity is unparalleled. He had perfect confidence in you. He felt justified in making a partial declaration of his feelings, having long had my assurance, received in the first place from you, that they were reciprocated. Imagine then the chagrin and surprise with which he, the soul of honor, heard from your daughter an indignant denial of his right to address her in that manner, referring him, as if for a just chastisement, to 'her husband?' Positively, Julia, I boil with wrath when I consider Oscar's position at that moment, and that you are at the bottom of it."

Tears of hopeless regret overflowed Mrs. Vance's eyes.

"I should not have allowed myself to be dragged by wild horses to that theatre," she cried. "Mr. Vance will move heaven and earth to gratify a whim of Massey's. He made me go against my judgment. It is unkind of you to consider that I am to blame."

The baroness rocked more violently back and forth, while a spot of angry color appeared on her cheeks. "I shall never change my opinion. It is useless for us to quarrel about it," she said. "I will finish the week with you, as I promised, and then I will join my son on his return from Washington, and we will sail for home with sore and heavy hearts, it is true; but he

is young, and in the end no doubt it will prove to be all for the best. If he can forget his unfortunate infatuation there are beautiful high-born girls at home who would be proud to be his bride."

The baroness spoke English fluently, but when greatly moved she unconsciously relapsed into her native tongue.

Mrs. Vance sighed, but she did not reply, for Massey at this moment entered the room. She seated herself beside the baroness and slid a little hand into the unresponsive pudgy fingers of her angry friend. The look with which she accompanied this action besought forgiveness.

"You must not sit here and bore each other," she said with a smile. "Are we not to drive in the Park?"

"I have ordered the horses," said Mrs. Vance, "but I am not sure that the baroness will care to go."

"To go or to stay is equally indifferent to me," she replied. "Suit yourselves. I shall remain until the end of the week, and you may do what you please with me." This was said with the resignation of a martyr.

"There is a reception this evening," said Mrs. Vance. "I accepted before I knew that the baron would not be with us."

"Let us go to that, too, if you like," responded the baroness grimly.

Massey looked up as if about to speak; but as Mrs. Vance did not meet her eye she remained silent, with

a half-amused, half-guilty consciousness of possessing a piece of information which, if shared with her companions, would effectually prevent their attendance at Mrs. Van Vliet's reception.

Mrs. Vance was relieved at the idea of avoiding an evening at home, where the baron's absence must suggest painful reflections ; but upon entering Mrs. Van Vliet's drawing-room she received a shock of unwelcome surprise.

"I wondered if you would come," whispered her hostess as she grasped her hand. "I am so glad to be assured that there is truth in the rumor that Mr. Maynard is to be reconciled to his wife. He is to play for us to-night, you know. He is the lion of the hour after the success of his opera, which nobody doubted." Then she squeezed Massey's hand and murmured, "Delighted, you know, to see you again with us."

The baroness presented an immovable countenance, and Mrs. Van Vliet stammered a few words of German, and presented her by a series of pantomimic gestures to the ladies standing near. Mrs. Vance was too much overcome by the unfortunate chance of Maynard's presence to do anything for the relief of her friend.

"We must go home at once," she cried, clutching Massey's arm. "Mr. Maynard is here. We should have been warned of it."

"I should like to hear him play," said Massey calmly.



"What will the baroness think of me?" groaned Mrs. Vance. "She will fancy that I have arranged it. She blames me already for everything that has occurred. I shall pretend to be faint, Massey, and you must come home with me."

"Wait a moment," said Massey imperiously, while a swift blush rose to her temples. Mrs. Vance followed the direction of her eyes, and was aware of a sight which caused her to sink breathless into a chair. Commodore Van Vliet, who stood near his wife, had greeted the baroness in fluent German, and, wishing to amuse her, had offered to present to her the lion of the evening. She had smilingly assented, using very good English in her reply, and she now stood laughing at the surprise of her host and offering her hand with regal condescension to Gerald Maynard, who stood before her, puzzled and embarrassed by the event, for the baroness, who had not recognized him, and had failed to catch his name or his title to distinction, drew him by degrees to the corner where Mrs. Vance and Massey were awaiting her.

"Here are two ladies who will be glad to meet you," said the baroness, waving her feather-fan in their direction, and failing to observe Massey's deepening blushes and Mrs. Vance's look of horror.

"Adelaide?" cried Mrs. Vance sharply. "What are you doing?"

Massey very simply and kindly shook hands with Gerald.

"I am glad of the opportunity to speak to you," she said. "I wished to tell you that I rejoiced at the triumph of your opera. I felt that I must see it, however odd my presence there might appear. I shall always be interested in your success."

"Come, Massey," cried Mrs. Vance. "I am faint. I insist that you shall come with me at once."

Massey obediently accompanied her aunt and the astounded baroness to their carriage, and she listened in patient serenity to their agitated comments and complaints during the homeward drive.

Gerald stood where Massey had left him, still conscious of her smile and touch. His host approached and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Am I to congratulate you, Maynard?" he asked. "Is it true that the separation between you and your charming wife is at an end?"

Gerald flashed an eloquent look upon him. "No. We are friends. I deserve nothing more," he answered. Then he seated himself at the piano and delighted such portions of the company as the prevailing chatter of many tongues allowed to listen, by a spirited rendering of the popular airs from *The Musketeer*.

When he could with propriety excuse himself he left the house and paced the streets, driven by an irresistible longing for active motion. For the first time he had become fully conscious of his own heart. He was capable of an intense, overpowering, unreasoning passion of love, and it was not given to Reine nor to

the Massey of the past to awaken this emotion. The Massey of the present could arouse it by the tone of her voice or her most indifferent look and gesture.

"Why is it," he asked himself, "that we value the impossible and long for the unattainable? She was mine, and I drove her from me. She is not mine, and I would give the world to possess her."

A sudden impulse led him to visit the deserted home which had been so long abandoned to silent desolation. He unlocked the door and turned on the electric light, which brought into evidence the invasion of spiders and dust, and the traces everywhere of long neglect. He sat down beside the empty hearth and tried to fancy Massey in her radiant loveliness as his *vis-d-vis*, mending his stockings, copying his music, or running to welcome his return with her fresh lips and outstretched arms.

"This narrow life of self-sacrifice was not good for her," he thought. "She could never have developed into the perfection of her glorious womanhood here at my fireside, reflecting my moods, grieving at my disappointments and bearing my cares."

He paced about the room, consumed with hopeless longing, and fighting alternately with futile fancies or with grim despair. Then, obeying a sudden impulse, he seated himself at Massey's writing-desk, and opened the drawers which still held the notes she had left unanswered, the calendar fixed at the date which he remembered too well, photographs and letters and the

despatch he had sent her on the day when he had gone to criticise Reine's picture. He looked these over with a groan.

"The past flings the evidences of my guilt in my face," he said. The ink was dried in the cut-glass inkwell which he had given Massey on her birthday. He took a sheet of her note-paper, still faintly scented by its violet sachet, and, using his stylographic pen, he wrote: "Massey, I love you, I adore you. I write this at your desk in the dear little house where I wish I could summon you at this moment by the power of my will. Perhaps in your dreams you are here in fancy. I have so much to say to you. The accumulated thoughts and experiences of the last eighteen months are pressing for utterance. I need your forgiveness for the fatal mistakes that I have made, my blind folly, my selfishness and conceit, the murder of our beautiful past, the loss of a happy future. I wish you to feel the sincerity of my grief, my shame, my longing and despair. Yet I can only say, I love you. I do not entreat your pity for the tears that are blinding me, for they are tears of love, not of sorrow. If you love me you will forgive me without my asking it."

He folded this note, conscious of its inadequacy to express the emotion that filled and exalted him. As he was about to take an envelope from the drawer, his hand encountered a folded wad of soft paper which slipped from his grasp and fell upon the floor. Out of it, as he picked it up, a gold ring rolled into his

hand. It was Massey's wedding ring. He looked at it with a poignant pang, realizing what her feelings must have been when she had slipped it from her finger and placed it there ; but the sight of it challenged his manhood to more strenuous endeavor. He placed the ring in his note, adding the words, "Wear this ring, dear, if there is hope for me."

When he posted his letter at the street corner, the glow of a May morning was warm in the east.

## CHAPTER XXII.

Mrs. VANCE was conscious of acting a part unworthy of her character when she confiscated this letter ; but when she read it she was filled with a righteous indignation against its author which justified the act in her belief and eased the compunctions of her conscience.

“Massey shall see it some day,” she thought as she locked it within the secret drawer of her cabinet, “on the day when I am sure she abhors the cold-hearted egotist who has wrecked her happiness. If I should give it to her at this moment, who knows but that she would fling herself into his arms and doom herself to a life more miserable than the old? He is famous now, and his wife would be only an adjunct to his glory. She would bear the constant friction between the artistic ideal and the humdrum reality which would grind her happiness into dust. She has been rescued from it so long that it would be a sin and a shame to give her up to it again. She has thriven and grown lovely under my care. I shall never forsake my charge.”

She reasoned herself into a glow of maternal ardor,

and a consciousness of duty done which supported her through the trying ordeal of the baroness's departure which ended a chapter of her hopes.

For several weeks after this event, Massey's spirits drooped, and she lost flesh and color. Mrs. Vance pleased herself with the delusive hope that she might be regretting her severity to the gallant baron, but a question, framed with the cautious purpose of arriving remotely at this conclusion, drew from Massey such an outburst of sincere indignation, that she was forced to acknowledge her mistake.

Rudolph Blackman had become a frequent visitor at the house. Massey welcomed him with a cordiality which was based upon the consciousness that he was Gerald's friend, and that in answer to her questions he was able to give her news of her husband's life and work, and detailed accounts of his conversation, or a description of his latest publication. Since Mrs. Vance showed an angry impatience when Gerald's name was pronounced, Massey instinctively chose a time when her aunt was absent, or otherwise occupied, to introduce the subject that was nearest to her thoughts. Rudolph gladly accepted the position of confidential friend, which enabled him to claim Massey's undivided attention, and to concentrate upon himself the gaze of her lovely eyes full of grateful appreciation.

He related interesting anecdotes of Gerald's friends, old and new. He told how Frank Bumstead still drank unlimited quantities of tea, and how Allen Grant

and Miss Linton sacrificed a romantic affection to a mistaken sense of duty. He speculated as to their future, and drew a lively picture of the young minister becoming a Romish priest, and Alice a member of the Salvation Army.

"When a woman once starts with a fanatical sense of duty, there is no length to which it may not carry her," he remarked.

"I can understand that longing for active work outside of oneself," said Massey. "I wish that I could throw myself into something that would seem so great and necessary to the cause of humanity that my life would be lost in the result to which it would contribute its little share, and my happiness or lack of it would seem absolutely insignificant when compared with the needs of the world's sorrow."

"Fancy your face in a poke-bonnet," said Rudolph, with admiration in his look and tone.

"Who knows that I may not come to it," said Massey. "I like the idea. It inspires me. I shall be that or a Sister of Charity."

"The Salvation Army would be best for you," said Rudolph. "The poke-bonnet would be more becoming than those ghastly black draperies and white headbands which suggest grave-clothes. The blue and red are a cheerful combination. I have sometimes seen the broad blue ribbons tied coquettishly beneath the chin, but I have never yet observed a beautiful face above them. Why is that, do you suppose?"



"You do not believe that I am in earnest," said Massey.

"No," answered Rudolph, "but if you are, I shall no doubt discover the same charm which appeals to you. I will enlist when you do. The street processions in the slums, the howling and hooting of an unfriendly mob, the wild encounters in the crusade against vice, would all be novelties which might be agreeable as such if revolting in their proper nature."

Massey's eyes grew moist. "If a woman need not love she could live a life of useful independence," she said. "You are Gerald's friend, you will understand that I cannot forget him. It is our separation which breaks my heart, and it is the hopelessness of my regret which makes me long for any other interest that would help me to outlive it."

Rudolph lowered his eyes, respecting the sacredness of her confidence, while she hastily brushed away a tear.

"If I could be of any help in effecting a reconciliation——" he began.

"Oh, do not tell him what I have said," cried Massey, anxiously. "I bitterly regret that I went to hear his Opera, that I showed any interest in him. It has evidently been misunderstood. For a woman in my position to make an apparent advance and to receive a repulse, can you understand the torture of that to her pride? His silence is a repulse. He does not wish to see me or to hear from me." She buried her face in her hands.

Rudolph looked at her with intense concern.

"I understand," he said, gently. "I know the evil heart of man only too well. It rejects that which is freely offered, and longs for that which is denied. If he saw you full of gay unconcern, enjoying life and admiration like so many of the young married women in society, whose sense of duty does not require them to sit in solitude at home when their husbands are absent; if, in a word, he could once feel the torments of jealousy, he would be more likely to return to you, valuing that which others value. Forgive me if I have wounded you. I know life as it is, not as it should be."

Massey's face had been crossed by a shadow of pain.

"This conversation humiliates me," she said, "but I am desperate. My aunt repulses my confidence, and misunderstands my character. To think that she, who has always known me, should urge me to obtain a divorce, that I might marry another man." She lifted her eyes, and flung out her hands in a gesture of appeal from cruel wrong. Then she turned to Rudolph with a quick change of expression.

"I should like to make him feel the tortures of jealousy," she said, "but how can one be jealous if he does not love?"

The simplicity of her manner and the pathos of her voice appealed to the chivalry of Rudolph's manhood; but opposed to this was the long-cherished habit of greed for new sensations and interesting situations in which he might pose both as actor and spectator; and

more than this, a real affection which struggled with his sense of duty, but was unsubdued by it. This moment was his opportunity, and he did not reject it.

"You know that you can trust my friendship for you both," he said. "If you do not wish me to go directly to Maynard with an appeal to his pity and sense of justice"—Massey made a gesture of indignant denial—"then you can bring him to your feet by acting a little comedy in which I will assist you. Let me be your frequent companion, drive with me, dance with me, walk with me, talk to me. I hope that it will not be distasteful to you. Why should we not play at being in love, as he and Miss Chapman have done for so long? It is a pretty pastime, and the end, in this case, justifies the means."

Massey's cheeks burned, and her eyes were full of unshed tears. Anger and love disputed tumultuously for victory; and the pain she felt when Rudolph probed the wound that always bled when she heard Miss Chapman's name, gave indignant force to her desire for revenge. To make Gerald love as she loved, to bring him humbled and suppliant to her feet, became a dominant purpose. She turned to Rudolph with a smile that hoped to cover a tearful agitation.

"If I agree to this, it will be only for effect," she said, "and the rule will hold only when we are in company. I should have no patience to be friendly with you when we were alone. When our masks were off we should be likely to hate each other heartily."

"Agreed," replied Rudolph, calmly, noticing the nervous tension of her manner. "I would do anything to serve you."

He took leave immediately, and Massey locked herself in her room and wept, alternately regretting her purpose, and rejoicing in it with a satisfaction which brought tears.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

GERALD watched and waited for an answer to his letter, and when none came he tried to reason himself into the belief that he had no right to expect it. Massey's serene friendliness when they had met was in itself a token of the distance which lay between them. If she had loved, she should have been agitated and ill at ease, or, like himself, unable to utter a word. How could he presume to rely upon an affection which had been so severely wounded that her woman's pride must rise in arms at any reminder of the past? If she treated him with kindness instead of active abhorrence, he owed it to the sweetness and generosity of her nature.

He resumed his ordinary occupations as one does who is stunned by a heavy bereavement which cannot be allowed to interfere with the daily task, but which clouds the brightness of the sun. He was especially exact in fulfilling the obligations of charity or friendship. It is at such times that they press most closely on the heart. He went every evening to the East side coffee-house where his performance on the melodeon already enjoyed a local renown, and filled its

rooms to overflowing. He walked with Allen Grant in the soft spring evenings through squalid, narrow streets, and noisome, crowded courtyards, carrying active assistance and practical consolation to those whose eyes and hearts were never lifted heavenward, and who had no ears for any message but the personal expression of willingness to aid. When the two young men were alone in the minister's study, they discussed the grave social problem that weighs most heavily on those who give their lives to solve it.

Allen Grant had few theories. His nature was direct and simple, and his familiarity with aggravated cases of misery and vice had given him the buoyant philosophy which is often deducible from their constant observation, and which shows an indifference to petty woes and a lack of morbid sensitiveness that is like a moral tonic to men such as Gerald Maynard, who are abnormally self-conscious and uneasily alive to every influence from without.

Miss Linton, too, was a valuable friend. She had forgiven Gerald for that which she could not understand in his past. Her work among the poor had widened in many directions, and she had gained in cheerfulness and self-reliance as she had learned her ability to perform what she had undertaken.

"It is so simple," she said to Gerald. "That is what makes it easy. The old society life is so complex. We attempt so much that we are always in arrears, if it is only in the matter of our calling-list.

To do one thing, and to do it well, is the secret of happiness."

One evening when Maynard called at Allen Grant's he was surprised to find, as he unceremoniously opened the study-door, that his friend was entertaining company at supper. Two ladies sat at the minister's small table, which was decorated with an extra candle and a large bunch of beautiful flowers. Both turned their heads as Allen greeted the new-comer, and they exclaimed in different tones of angry and pleased surprise, "It is Gerald!"

"My dear aunts, this is a surprise," he said as he shook hands with Miss Mercy and Miss Hetty Brinkerhoff.

Allen motioned him to a seat at the table.

"My Bishop is making her annual visitation," he said

Miss Mercy laughed, showing square projecting teeth which interfered with the regularity of her otherwise pleasant features.

"I am so glad you came, Gerald," she said. "I have heard news of you for a long time when you did not suspect that your doings were being reported in Suffolk. You need not blush, for Mr. Grant is a favorable reporter. I have heard of your kindness to old Mrs. Simpson, and the noble way in which you interfered as John William's champion in a fight with his drunken brother. Poor John, with his weak spine, is an old friend of mine. Allen tells me that you are becoming really religious."

Gerald blushed in vexed confusion.

"Among friends one should not be unwilling to own it," said Grant in his kindly way, regretting Miss Mercy's lack of tact, and Gerald's evident displeasure.

"I do not know why it is harder to bear a supposition of virtue than an imputation of vice," said Maynard, and then he blushed again, for Miss Hetty's eyes were regarding him with significant displeasure.

"Mercy has too much of the quality of her name," she said. "She thinks every one religious who goes poking about in unhealthy corners and wretched tenement-houses. Now I would rather a person should live a correct and moral life than to have him sing Salvation Army hymns, or even pass the alms-basin in church. A great many church-members are hypocrites."

This speech had a depressing effect upon the conversation. Allen served Gerald to cold meat and bread, and Miss Mercy sniffed at the bouquet of flowers.

"I am so glad you chanced to meet Mr. Grant, Gerald," she said, recovering herself. "It was just what I have always wished for you. Every time we come down to New York in the spring Hetty and I spend an evening here, and there is nothing I enjoy more. Mr. Grant and I talk business and charity-work, and Hetty chaperones me. She thinks it is impossible for me to come into this district alone, while, on the contrary, I feel quite as much at home here as in our own little Suffolk where even the cows know me. Mr. Grant's Bishop does not approve of me, I am



sure, for he thinks I am a disturbing influence here. If he should hear the joke about my annual visitation he would frown still more decidedly."

She laughed nervously, for she felt the influence of her sister's manner. Miss Hetty watched her nephew for a while in hostile silence, and then inquired abruptly, "Where is your wife now, Gerald?"

Miss Mercy blushed, while Gerald answered calmly, "I suppose you know that she is in this country. She returned from Germany last month, and is at her uncle's house."

"Oh," said Miss Hetty, "I hoped that it was not true that your separation was final. It is such a disgraceful thing for the family. Never mind Mr. Grant, Mercy," she added, acknowledging sundry shoves and frowns from her sister. "He knows all about it, and he ought to use his influence to prevent the scandal. I want to tell you, Gerald, and I might as well say it here and now, that unless you are reconciled to your wife, your name will be erased from the family Bible, and your relatives will disown you."

"Oh, Hetty!" cried Miss Mercy, as if pleading for a more lenient sentence.

"It does not depend upon me," answered Gerald, coloring quickly. "There are certain things that are beyond one's control."

Miss Hetty gave him an incredulous look, and, leaning across the corner of the table, she whispered in his ear, "At any rate, for the sake of respectability, you

could leave this woman whom every one talks about in connection with you."

Gerald started as if he had heard the hiss of a serpent. "Is the world so full of evil minds that the noblest women are not safe from slander!" he exclaimed. "Let me tell you, Aunt Hetty, that any one who breathes a word against Miss Chapman is a liar." He rose in agitation from the table. "I will come again, Grant," he said. "I must go into the air—I feel as if I were stifling here."

Miss Mercy followed him into the hall and took his hand with kind concern.

"Hetty means well," she said. "Dear Gerald, we have all suffered. We do not know what to believe. It has been a great blow to our family pride. Is there no way in which I can help to make your peace? Such things so often arise from a wretched misunderstanding."

"This has been greatly misunderstood," he answered in a choking voice.

Miss Mercy pressed his hand. "It will all come right," she said. "Go openly to your wife and entreat her forgiveness. Why do people leave opportunities for misinterpretation when a simple talk, face to face, would avoid a lifetime of regret?"

She spoke with feeling, and then nodded and smiled a farewell. When he was gone Miss Mercy wiped away a few tears, dedicated to the memory of the past, before rejoining her companions in the study.

She was soon laughing and chatting with Allen at his desk in a corner, over accounts and reports, while Miss Hetty sat at a distance doing art embroidery. Miss Mercy took occasion in one of the pauses of their work to lower her voice to a confidential tone.

"How is Miss Linton?" she asked. "Is she any kinder to you, Allen?"

"She is kind to me," he answered, "but she will never marry me."

"Foolish girl," exclaimed Miss Mercy. "Would it do any good if I should talk to her?"

"I think not," he replied. "I know what she would say. She is convinced that earnest women who have a life-work ready to their hands have no call to marry. She thinks, besides, that it would hamper me in my work. Marriage for a poor man brings inevitable cares, responsibilities and anxieties. She thinks that these would interfere with the heavenly life."

"And do you agree?" asked Miss Mercy.

"I love her," answered Allen simply.

"When people love they should marry," exclaimed Miss Mercy. "If they stopped to weigh the matter and to argue the consequences there would be no marriages."

"So much the better," cried Miss Hetty from her corner.

Miss Mercy laughed. This was a subject of argument between the two sisters, the one of whom was

a frank sentimentalist, and the other a pretended cynic.

"Do not listen to us, Hetty, for we shall not adopt your opinions. We have all our accounts to go over yet, but this is a little private discussion that is very important," and lowering her voice she added, "I will intercede for you. If my money were mine to will away you should not remain a poor man."

"You are too good," answered Allen fervently. "Alice would listen to you sweetly and patiently, but in the end she would say, 'I love Mr. Grant too well to marry him,' and that would be unanswerable."

With this he drew a ledger towards him and began an explanation of the expenditures of the mission school, dispensary, and chapel. Miss Mercy listened with a divided attention.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN Gerald parted from his aunt he turned his steps in the direction that would lead to Brooklyn, and as he was crossing Fulton Market he met Frank Bumstead face to face.

"I was coming to see you," said Bumstead.

"I was on my way to your house," responded Gerald.

"We must have been moved by a common need of each other's society," said Frank with a nervous laugh.

"I will return with you to your rooms, and we can talk as we go. What have you to say to me?"

"You have the floor," replied his friend. "I will hear you first."

Frank coughed and hesitated. "I am afraid to offend you, or at least to wound or displease you," he said. "I do not know how to tell you. I have asked Reine to marry me and she has consented."

Gerald started and exclaimed.

"Of course it will not be at once," Frank continued half apologetically. "She wishes it to be announced. At the same time she tells me that it must be a long engagement."

He looked anxiously at his friend as he spoke. "You do not like it of course," he said.

Gerald turned with a beaming face, and grasped both his hands, shaking them heartily.

"My dear fellow, I am delighted beyond measure," he exclaimed. "I congratulate you from my soul. It is too good to be true. Is it a fact that you are to marry Reine, or are you telling it to me in a dream? You are the only man in the world who is worthy of her."

"I do not deserve my happiness," said Frank, "but it is true. It happened last evening at the Madison Square Theatre. I had asked her before but she would not give me an answer. Strangely enough your wife sat directly in front of us. She was with Mr. Blackman. Coming out she looked Reine full in the face and bowed to her with a peculiar smile. Reine colored, and her eyes kindled as they do when she feels deeply. It was evident that the two exchanged a silent message. When we were outside Reine said, 'I will marry you, Frank, in six years, not before; but you may announce the engagement to-morrow.'"

"Six years," exclaimed Gerald, by way of showing his interest, though he was not thinking of his words, nor of Frank's reply.

"Oh, that is a figurative expression, I hope," said Frank, his spirits rising as he assured himself beyond a doubt that his friend was sincere in his congratulations. "I am too happy to exist. I have always

loved Reine in a silent, hopeless way. I never dreamed of asking her to marry me. It was like laying claim to a title I did not deserve, like insisting on a patent of nobility, or a place in the cabinet."

"Nonsense," said Gerald, preserving the balance of his thoughts by a mechanical sort of double consciousness. "There is nothing good that you do not deserve. You are too modest by half."

"Where are you going?" asked Bumstead, as they made a turn contrary to his expectations.

"I have a call to make up-town," responded Gerald. "Forgive me for giving you the slip on such a joyful occasion. We will celebrate it properly at another time."

"And what were you coming to tell me?"

"It is of no importance. I have forgotten."

Frank was disappointed, for he had cherished the hope of an interested listener to whom he might discourse the whole evening on the inexhaustible subject of Reine's perfections and his own felicity. He parted from his friend, however, with his customary good humor, deferring the promised satisfaction to another meeting.

Gerald rang the bell at Mr. Vance's house, and was informed that the ladies were out.

"Can you tell me where they have gone?" he inquired, and the servant, who knew him, gave him the information that they were dining at Mrs. Houghton's.

Maynard looked at his watch and calculated the

length of time that would probably be required for a dinner, coming to the conclusion that it was not too early for him to make a call which he owed at that house. He could not have given definite expression to his expectations, but he wished to be near Massey, where he might listen to her voice and perhaps exchange a word with her.

Miss Houghton came to receive him in a little white satin reception-room into which the footman had ushered him. She had left her company, and possibly her dessert, for the sound of voices came merrily from a not distant dining-room.

"Mamma is distressed to miss your call," she said, "but we have company to dinner; a few informal friends, you know, but of course she must stay and entertain them. It is a bore sometimes. Do tell me, Mr. Maynard, how you ever happened to think of the plot of *The Musketeer*. It is the cleverest thing! My friends laugh at me for talking about the plot of an opera. Even novels do not have plots nowadays. But that is the beauty of your work. It is so consistent, besides having the charm which every one expects in a successful opera, delightful music. It is not the sort of music that one can remember exactly, not the jingling kind that will become a street tune; but it leaves an after-effect of some sort, an undertone, or overtone—could you call it?—that really haunts one, I have been five nights. Only fancy! Is not that a laurel leaf in your crown? I really cannot tire of it; but I may



seem tiresome to you. It is sometimes a great bore to hear oneself praised, especially when everybody says exactly the same things. You would rather talk of something else, I am sure. Great men are always modest. Now please do not set me down as a flatterer. Mamma says that my enthusiasms run away with me. We were going to talk of something else. Oh ! Have you read *God's Fool*? and is it not a horrid book ? Of course it is very fine, and very religious, and it is delightful nowadays to come upon any sort of a writer who has any religion ; but at the same time I always read a book for the story. I do not pretend to be literary, though I belong to half a dozen reading circles. But to have the last chapter put first, and to read the end before the beginning, is it not too much after the style of the Chinese who eat their desserts first. What ! Must you go ? and so soon ! Your visit is not at all untimely. Do not imagine it. Mamma will be excessively sorry. Pray come again when she may have the pleasure. Ah, *good-evening*."

Such was the form, if not the entire substance, of Miss Houghton's conversation, Maynard's share in it being confined to a few desultory remarks to which his fair hostess listened with her head bent in an attitude of smiling attention, while she played with the bracelets on her wrists and occasionally peeped furtively at the toe of her boot projecting a little beyond the shimmering folds of her dress, which she hoped her caller knew enough to recognize as one of Doucet's "creations."

When he was gone she hastened to her mother, who had just entered the drawing-room with the other ladies, and, clasping her about the waist, she whispered in her ear: "It was as good as a play. I am trembling with excitement. Of course he came to see his wife, and there was only a partition between them, and there might have been an encounter, a duel—only fancy!"

"Nonsense, Eleanor, you read too many French novels," remarked her mother, returning to her guests.

Eleanor slid into a seat beside Massey. "My mother says I read too many novels," she remarked, "but I think that modern novels teach one to observe, and there is nothing so interesting as the study of life. Do not you think so?"

"I think that life in itself is very tiresome," said Massey, lifting her eyes gravely.

When Maynard found himself outside in the darkness he paced back and forth for a while, observing the windows of Mrs. Houghton's drawing-room. He fancied that he saw Rudolph Blackman cross the lighted space. He imagined him seated at Massey's side as he had been beside her at the theatre. The mingled pain and fury that he felt taught him that there were possibilities of emotion which he had never sounded.

His life for the next few days was given up to a determined tracing of Massey's footsteps. He knew the hours when she went calling, shopping, or to church, and from an unnoticed point of observation he watched

her movements, careless whether he were himself observed. He learned the time when she rode or drove in the Park, with Rudolph Blackman most often for her escort, and he followed on foot and sat in the shadow, hoping for a glimpse of her face.

Massey started when for the first time she caught sight of his motionless figure on a bench under the trees. Rudolph lifted his hat as they spun by, but Gerald gave no answering greeting. His fiery gaze was fixed on Massey with a look of eloquent reproach. She blushed, half with shame, half with delight.

Rudolph read her feelings, and remarked in an indifferent tone: "They say that Maynard has been beside himself since Miss Chapman's engagement has been announced. The world is so ready to credit a man with a mental preoccupation of that sort, if they see him, for instance, frequent the Park alone at unseasonable hours, or show a noticeable degree of absence of mind in society; when most likely it is only a new sonata of which Maynard is thinking. It is not safe to judge by appearances."

Massey turned her head, while a smile still dimpled the corners of her mouth. She was sure that the angry threat she had read in Gerald's eyes referred only to herself and to her power to vex him.

"Has he agreed to be present at your ball to-morrow night?" she asked.

"I sent him an invitation to which he has not responded," answered Rudolph drily. "I could do

nothing further to make sure of his presence except to invite Miss Chapman, who has accepted."

Massey's brow contracted slightly and she raised her eyes to her companion's face.

"Why do you like to wound me by these allusions?" she asked. "You have been very kind to me, giving up so much time, and taking so much trouble to aid me in my foolish little scheme of winning my husband back through jealousy. My conscience has not been at ease for a moment all this time. If it were not for my faith in the nobility of Gerald's nature I should fear that I might be punished by his scorn and anger, and lose his love at the last. As it is, I have spent sleepless nights in terror of it. But an absurd sort of happiness has come to me now, since we met him a moment ago, and he looked at me like that. You understand. I cannot explain it. I feel as if I could dance and sing. I am sure that to-morrow night, at your ball, which you have contrived on purpose to afford me the opportunity of an explanation with him, he will ask me to forgive him. You know what my answer will be."

She blushed and averted her eyes as she spoke, lifting her look with a happy smile to the blue which showed above the interlacing tree-tops. Rudolph grew pale to the lips. He touched his spirited horses with the whip, and for several moments was occupied in the endeavor to bring them again under control. He could not at first trust himself to speak.

"If Maynard does not come to the ball——" he began.

"I shall not come unless he is to be there," she replied.

"It would be better to give it up then, and withdraw the invitations," said Rudolph. "He told Frank Bumstead that he does not mean to be present."

"Why?" asked Massey, quickly.

"I do not know," he answered, hardly able to control his voice.

"I shall find out," she said decidedly. "I shall ask him myself. Please drive on the road by the lake, and we may meet him again."

"Do you mean to speak to him here?" he asked.

Massey nodded assent.

Gerald was seated on a bench by the lake, listlessly watching a party of children in charge of their nurse, who were feeding the swans that circled gracefully about near the shore. The merry shouts of the youngsters filled the air. He looked up hastily at the sound of wheels. Blackman reined in his horses and caused them to stop, panting and trembling, near the lake, while Massey leaned forward and called, "Mr. Maynard!"

He approached her, pale with amazement.

"Mr. Blackman fears that you will not be present at his ball to-morrow night, since you have sent no acceptance to the invitation," she said quickly. "Pray come for my sake. I will keep a waltz for you."

Gerald's face shone with sudden delight. "I will come!" he answered, and he stood hat in hand, while, in response to her gesture, Rudolph drew the reins across his horses' backs, and the light vehicle spun onwards. When they had turned into a remote driveway, he slackened their speed again into a walk.

"Let us go home," said Massey.

Rudolph sat with downcast eyes as if in deep reflection. He roused himself at the sound of her voice.

"Oh, yes," he said, "we will go home," but he made no change in his course.

"Is there anything the matter? Are you ill?" she asked.

He gave an odd laugh, and looked at her intently. "I was only wondering if I should not fling you into the water and myself after you," he said.

Massey gave a cry of alarm. "You must be mad!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no, I am not," he answered, "for I resisted the impulse. Have you no idea of what I have suffered all this time for your sake? I love you as I never thought I could love a woman. Realize, if you can, what it is to me to see you fling the treasures of your love at the feet of this selfish egotist, who may consent, now that everything else has failed him, to lower his sceptre, and receive you as King Ahasuerus received Queen Esther when she came suing for his favor."

"Take me home, I entreat, I insist," cried Massey, trembling with indignant anger.

Rudolph obediently turned his horses' heads. "I hoped that your pride might help you to forget him," he said in a monotonous voice. "A woman is lost when she gives up her pride. He will disdain you as he did before. A day will come when you will wish that I had flung you in the lake, and ended the 'fever and the fret' forever."

"How can you dare to say this to me?" exclaimed Massey. "I am punished for having put my trust in you. I thought you were Gerald's friend and mine. You are doing yourself an injustice, Mr. Blackman, thus to make it impossible for me to continue to respect you. You will bitterly regret having given way to an impulse unworthy of you. I should not have given you the opportunity to forget yourself. I have been culpably thoughtless. I trusted your kindness, your manliness, your sense of honor."

Rudolph's expression changed. "I have taught you that men are not to be trusted," he said. "But it is a passing madness, Mrs. Maynard. I will control it in future. I promise not to offend again. You will come to my ball, you will dance the first set with me as you promised, and you will leave my house on the arm of your husband."

Massey lifted her eyes with a happy smile.

"You are Gerald's friend again," she said, "and you deserve my grateful thanks."

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE evening of Rudolph Blackman's long-talked-of ball was bright and clear. The early summer had invaded the city with a forecast of August heat, but the night brought a refreshing chill.

Massey dressed for the evening in a mood of listless dejection. She had lost the happy assurance which she had gained from Gerald's look when she had met him by the lake. Since that moment, without acknowledging it to herself, she had been looking with vain expectation for his coming.

When she descended the stairway in her shimmering ball-dress there was none of the pleasure of gratified vanity in her heart as she met her uncle's admiring gaze. He had been pacing the hall nervously, waiting for his wife, who was detained by a caller in the reception-room.

"I may as well prepare you for a scene, Massey," he said, as he kissed his niece with tender anxiety. "Maynard is in there talking to your aunt. He has come to make a high-handed claim upon you. He insists that you must not go to this ball without him. He asks for an open reconciliation."



Massey grew pale to the lips.

"You will be brave, my darling. You will assert your dignity. Remember all that you have suffered," said Mr. Vance.

The door of the reception-room was flung open, and Mrs. Vance ran to her niece with a hysterical mingling of tears and laughter.

"He says you love him, Massey ; that you as good as told him so in the Park ; and he has made me confess that I kept back his letter. There it is, and your wedding-ring and all. So this, I suppose, is the end of the play ; and in spite of all you owe to us who love you, you will take back the prodigal against our wishes, and be wretched forever after."

She sank upon a chair in the hall and wiped tears of resentment and chagrin from her eyes.

Maynard advanced and took Massey's reluctant hand. "Dear Massey," he said, "I do not wish to intrude upon you, but it has become evident to me that I cannot endure to see you enter that man's house unless it is on my arm, as your husband. That must be what you intended when you suggested that we should dance together there. But must we go to the ball, and encounter the eyes of the crowd ? Shall we not walk quietly home together ? Aunt Mercy promised me that the little house should be put in readiness for its mistress. I told her what my hopes were. Are they in vain ?"

"You can read his letter, Massey," said her aunt.

"I kept it back from you. I felt that it was my duty to do so ; but I might have known that it would be useless in the end."

Massey read the letter, and pondered it a while with downcast eyes.

"You did very wrong to deceive me, Aunt Julia," she said. "I will go to the ball, of course. It would be unfair to disappoint Mr. Blackman."

She turned and cast an enigmatical glance at Gerald's anxious face

"You might have chosen a more opportune time to demand an explanation," she said. "My uncle's door has never been closed to you. Why should you have trusted to the uncertainty of the mails, when a conversation is so much easier and more direct?"

She blushed and hesitated. There was a movement of suspense among the others. "I suppose it would be better, as you say, for me to appear in public with my husband," she added. "You may go first if you will, Aunt Julia, and send the carriage back for us."

To this Mrs. Vance reluctantly consented, feeling the impulse of an inevitable fate.

Left alone with his wife, Gerald began to pour out the ardor of his affection, but he spoke to deaf ears. Massey swept through the drawing-room in her trailing satin robes and seated herself at the piano where she began to thrum upon the keys with a far-away gaze, as if unmindful of his presence.

"My dearest, it is unkind of you not to give me an answer. I cannot endure the suspense," he said.

"You have endured it with cheerful contentment for over a year," retorted Massey, bringing out the thundering chords of *Die Walküre* with a force which made conversation impossible.

"Listen to me," he cried in her ear.

She shook her head, and continued the music. Gerald sank into an easy-chair and buried his face in his hands.

"You play wonderfully well," he said, lifting his head as she concluded.

"Yes, I have improved," said Massey. "There is the carriage. Are you ready?"

Gerald trembled with a delightful hope as he followed his wife, and adjusted her cloak over her shoulders. She allowed the tips of her fingers to touch his arm, as he led her to the carriage, and he sat beside her and held her fan and bouquet as he had used to do in the old days. But how unlike the ungracious revolt of his former protest against such marital obligations was the all-sufficing joy of her presence; his pride in her beauty, her charm, the glory of her womanhood; and the blending of passionate tenderness, exultant self-congratulation, and deep humility which filled his heart.

Rudolph Blackman stood at the door of his drawing-room to receive his guests; and the color mounted painfully to his forehead when Massey entered on her husband's arm. He stammered a few incoherent

words, while Mrs. Houghton warmly grasped Massey's hands, and greeted her with significant pleasure.

"This is indeed a joyful occasion," she said. "I suspected that Mr. Blackman had something pleasant in reserve when he promised us that Mrs. Maynard was to be present. He has always been such a friend to your husband. It is so rare in these days to see a man capable of disinterested friendship."

It was the common opinion that Rudolph had contrived the ball to advertise to the world the reconciliation of the husband and wife who were the centre of observation while they remained in the ballroom; but their stay was brief.

Massey talked to old friends, smiled upon new acquaintances, walked through a few square dances, and then took leave of her host with a friendly hand-clasp.

"I owe you a great deal," she said. "I wish I could thank you enough."

"Oh, Mrs. Maynard," said Rudolph in an accent of despair, "do not thank me for what I heartily wish undone. I am the most wretched man in the world. When you have left, when this chattering crowd is gone, I shall probably end it all with a pistol shot."

"Oh, do not talk so wildly," said Massey. "Happiness comes after awhile if one is brave enough to wait for it."

Rudolph shook his head. "There is no balm in Gilead for me," he said. When he had watched her

depart, he returned to the ballroom to listen with a smile to Julia Hartley's idle chatter.

Massey's hand trembled upon her husband's arm as they left the house together.

"You look white and tired," he said. "Shall we take the carriage?"

"No, we will walk," answered Massey. "It will do me good. But what will people think if they notice my dress and my shoes?"

"They will think that we have just been married," said Gerald, "and here is your wedding ring which I must place again upon your finger "

"Oh, my ring," said Massey. "How often I have wished for it. I have worn another in its place, so that no one knew."

Gerald began some eager protestations of penitence for the past, but Massey cut his words short.

"Let us forget the past," she said gaily. "It is dead and buried, and we will put a gravestone over it, and sit down and mourn beside it whenever we need to do penance; but not to-night. I am too happy for that now."

Gerald responded by a rhapsody of affection to which she listened willingly.

They were passing a lighted church where a midnight service had just been concluded.

The worshippers were departing by twos and threes in the darkness.

"Let us go in," said Massey. "I should like to

pray there in the quiet with those candles burning on the altar."

They entered and seated themselves in a dark corner. The church was empty. The priest had retired to the vestry-room. Massey knelt and buried her face in her hands ; but she did not pray ; no words came to her. She was conscious of nothing but a warm, exultant, exuberant happiness which filled her heart.

Presently she looked up and smiled at Gerald, who knelt beside her with his eyes upon her face.

"How I used to long that we might kneel and pray together side by side in church," she said. "That time seems very far away. Have you learned to pray, dear?"

"I do not know," he answered. "My heart is very full now ; but all I find words for is, *Thank God.*"

They sat for a while hand in hand upon the cushioned bench in the solemn twilight.

"How soothing the silence is," said Massey. "Here I am not afraid of my happiness. Here I am not ashamed to tell you that I love you."

"I will try to deserve my joy," said Gerald with emotion. "I hope that I am not the heartless egotist I once was. Life has taught me its lesson."

"Let us talk of the future," said Massey. "I have such charming plans. We are to go abroad together, and you shall study in the conservatories of Dresden and Paris. I will work with you. Blavatsky shall help you in your career. He has been my friend and

teacher all this time. Music has been my consolation."

Gerald pressed her hand.

"We will start at once," she continued. "I long to begin a new life with you, away from the past and from every one we have known."

"It is a beautiful dream," he answered. "We will talk of it, and plan for it, and some day realize it; but just now I am busy with so many prosaic money-making schemes that tie me to my place. I have an organ and a choir at Mr. Baker's Baptist church. The music is not such as you would care for, but it pays well. Then I have a dozen or more music-pupils. Composing, you know, is not to be depended on as a source of income. Allen Grant expects me to play the organ every Friday evening at his chapel, and on spare nights I give a performance on the melodeon at his coffee-house. You must go with me, dearest, and sing Moody and Sankey hymns to please the dwellers in the slums."

"Oh, Gerald, your life has been more useful and unselfish than mine," said Massey. "It is the religion of service."

"Come, shall we go?" urged Gerald. "They are putting out the candles."

THE END.



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